

CIVIL SERVICES EXAMINATION focus

MONTHLY NOTES BY RAU'S

CHINA IS WORLD'S LARGEST DEBT COLLECTOR 136

EDUCATING THE MIND WITHOUT EDUCATING OUR HEART
IS NO EDUCATION AT ALL 141

THE GREATEST GLORY IN LIVING LIES NOT IN NEVER
FALLING, BUT IN RISING EVERY TIME WE FALL. 143

VIOLENCE IS THE LAST REFUGE OF THE INCOMPETENT. 145

CURRENT AFFAIRS ANALYSIS

logical . simple . targeted
analysis & explanation
of relevant news

ETHICS, INTEGRITY & APTITUDE

Coverage from
varied
sources

ESSAYS OF THE MONTH

Selected essays
from Rau's
GSI students

JANUARY 2025



RAU'S IAS STUDY CIRCLE

Since 1953

focus

CRITICAL NOTES FOR THE PREPARATION OF GENERAL STUDIES PAPERS

Chief Executive Officer : Abhishek Gupta

Executive Editor : Pooja Bhatt

Editorial Team : Naweed Akhter, Sanjeev Pandey, Vrinda Gupta, Basava Uppin, Vaibhav Mishra, Faizan Khan, Gaurav Tripathi, Raja Kumar, Abhishek Pratap, Jatin Bharadwaj, Shashank Singh, Pooja Bhatt, Abhishek Sharma

Design and Production : Rohit Rajput

The purpose of Focus is to expound the applied nature of General Studies to Civil Services aspirants thereby making them aware of the real demand of UPSC exam.

The sources relied for selection and analysis of issues are:

- | | |
|----------------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. The Hindu, The Hindu (Sun.) | 2. The Indian Express |
| 3. The Times of India | 4. Asian Age |
| 5. The Tribune | 6. The Economic Times |
| 7. Hindu Business Line | 8. Frontline |
| 9. Economic and Political Weekly | 10. IDSA |
| 11. BBC | 12. Yojana |
| 13. Kurukshetra | 14. Down to Earth |



NEW DELHI-ORN CAMPUS

11-B, Bada Bazar Rd., Old Rajinder Nagar, New Delhi-110 060
(Near Karol Bagh Metro station)
Tel : 011 - 4078 6050

BENGALURU CAMPUS

2nd Floor, AKS Plaza, 10 Industrial Layout,
Jyoti Niwas College (JNC) Road, 5th Block,
Koramangala, Bengaluru - 560 095 (Karnataka)
Tel : 080 - 4142 6050, 255 35536/ 37, 99160 35536,
88618 22955

email : contact@rauias.com

website : www.rauias.com

You Tube : <https://www.youtube.com/@rausias1953>

NO PART OF THIS PUBLICATION MAY BE REPRODUCED OR TRANSMITTED, IN ANY FORM OR MANNER OR BY ANY MEANS - ELECTRONIC, MECHANICAL, PHOTOCOPY OR OTHERWISE, OR STORED IN ANY RETRIEVAL SYSTEM OF ANY NATURE WITHOUT THE WRITTEN CONSENT OF THE COPYRIGHT HOLDER, RAU'S IAS STUDY CIRCLE

Dear Students,

FOCUS is the Study Circle's monthly publication of contemporary issues and current affairs analysis. It is in fact a collective effort, by experienced educators in varied themes, of identifying current affairs in light of the UPSC syllabus, supplementing them with background information, explaining their related dimensions, lending them a generalist viewpoint and thus producing critical notes for the preparation of General Studies' syllabus.

The publication, as the name suggests, focuses solely on issues which are relevant to the **factual** as well as **applied** aspects of the General Studies' syllabus. That is how Focus covers all anticipated issues and themes for the upcoming Civil Services Examination (CSE).

Features

PART ONE | CURRENT AFFAIRS ANALYSIS

- This month's edition covers analysis of news from the immediately preceding month.
- All news/issues are categorized and clubbed syllabus-wise (International Relations, Polity & Governance, Science & Technology, Ethics, Integrity & Aptitude and so on) for efficient study.
- Background information has been added to provide context.
- Related and Additional information-dimensions have been explained to add depth to your understanding.
- Maps and figures have been provided for associative and retentive learning.
- Practice Questions

PART TWO | ETHICS, INTEGRITY & APTITUDE

- Coverage from varied sources

PART THREE | ESSAYS FOR YOU

- Selected essays from Rau's GSI students

For further understanding or discussion in any topic, please consult your respective professors.

Good Luck!

RAU'S IAS STUDY CIRCLE

CONTENTS

PART-1: CURRENT AFFAIRS

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

# GS PAPER (PRELIMS) & GS PAPER III (MAIN)	6
NEED FOR NEW SEEDS ACT IN INDIA	6
#agriculture	6
FARMER ID	7
#agriculture #inclusivegrowth	7
WINDFALL TAX	8
#taxation	8
HOUSE PRICE INDEX (HPI)	8
#inflation #infrastructure	8
TIME TO REVIEW INFLATION TARGETING	9
#inflation #monetarypolicy	9
RESOLVING BASE YEAR CONUNDRUM IN NATIONAL ACCOUNTING	9
#national accounting	9
FERTILIZER SUBSIDIES: MECHANISM AND CHALLENGES	10
#agriculture #fertilizers subsidy	10
RBI DEVELOPS AI TOOL TO DETECT MULE ACCOUNTS	12
#banking #governance	12
BIMA SAKHI YOJANA	13
#financial inclusion	13
HURDLES TO CHINA PLUS ONE OPPORTUNITY	14
#manufacturing #industrial growth	14
SWITZERLAND REVOKES INDIA'S MFN STATUS	15
#trade relations	15
WTO AGREEMENT ON FISHERIES SUBSIDIES	16
#subsidies #international agreements prelims nuggets	16
SOVEREIGN GREEN BONDS	17
#financial instruments #green finance	17
JALVAHAK SCHEME	17
#infrastructure	17
AMENDMENTS IN INSURANCE ACTS AND COMPOSITE LICENSE	19
#financial inclusion	19
WRITTEN OFF ASSETS OF THE BANKS	20
#banking and finance	20

5

6

6

6

6

7

7

8

8

8

8

9

9

9

9

9

10

10

12

12

13

13

14

14

15

15

16

16

17

17

17

17

19

19

20

20

CREDIT GUARANTEE SCHEME FOR E-NWR BASED PLEDGE FINANCING	21
#agricultural credit	21
ALTERNATIVE INVESTMENT FUNDS	22
#financial markets	22
DEBATE AROUND LEGALISATION OF MINIMUM SUPPORT PRICE	22
#agriculture #subsidies	22
SOVEREIGN GOLD BOND SCHEME	24
#financial instruments	24
RBI ASKS STATES TO SUSTAIN FISCAL PRUDENCE	25
#fiscal policy #mobilisation of resources	25
NITI AAYOG PROPOSES S.A.F.E. ACCOMMODATIONS	26
#welfare mechanisms #inclusive growth	26
WHY ARE GREEN DEPOSITS STRUGGLING?	27
#mobilisation of resources #green deposits	27
CII SUGGESTS CHANGES IN PSL NORMS	28
#banking and finance	28
TOUGH ROADS TO VIKSIT BHARAT BY 2047	29
#economic growth	29
PDS POSING CHALLENGES IN CPI CALCULATION	30
#inflation #consumer price index	30
STRENGTHENING FISHERIES EXTENSION SERVICES	31
#agriculture and allied activities	31
REDUCTION IN DOMESTIC MIGRATION	32
#migration #labour	32
HOUSEHOLD CONSUMPTION EXPENDITURE SURVEY: 2023-24	33
#consumption expenditure #inflation	33
INDIA'S FINANCIAL SYSTEM SHOWING STABILITY & RESILIENCE:	
RBI	34
#banking	34
SVAMITVA SCHEME: TEN STATES YET TO JOIN	35
#government schemes	35

CONSTITUTION, POLITY AND GOVERNANCE 38

# GS PAPER (PRELIMS) & GS PAPER II (MAIN)	38
RESERVATION MUST NOT BE BASED ON RELIGION: SC	38
#Reservation	38

PARDONING POWER OF PRESIDENT IN THE US AND IN INDIA		CHINA'S DEBT TRAP DIPLOMACY	65
	39	#Geopolitics	65
#Indian Constitution	39	TURMOIL IN SYRIA: ASSAD REGIME ENDS	66
CIVIL SERVICES REFORMS: INDIA'S STEEL FRAME NEEDS A		#Geopolitics #West Asia	66
CHECK	41	HOUTHİ REBELS BECOMING KEYSTONE OF IRAN'S 'AXIS OF	
#Civil Services Reforms	41	RESISTANCE'	67
PRIOR SANCTIONS REQUIRED TO PROSECUTE PUBLIC		#West Asia	67
SERVANTS UNDER PMLA	41	INDIA-UAE BILATERAL RELATIONS	69
#Governance	41	#Bilateral Relations #West Asia	69
ONE CANDIDATE MULTIPLE CONSTITUENCY	42	INDIA-KUWAIT RELATIONS	70
#Electoral Reforms	42	#Bilateral Relations	70
URBAN LOCAL GOVERNMENT ELECTIONS	43	INDIA-SAUDI ARABIA TO EXPLORE JOINT VENTURES IN	
#Municipalities #Electoral Reforms	43	DEFENCE SECTOR	71
POOR ELECTORAL PARTICIPATION OF OVERSEAS INDIAN		#Bilateral Relations	71
VOTERS	45	WHAT MANIPUR NEEDS?	72
#Electoral Reforms	45	#Internal Security	72
DEMAND FOR MITHILANCHAL STATE	46	WHAT IS THE H-1B VISA?	74
#State Formation	46	#Employment #Diaspora	74
REMOVAL OF RAJYA SABHA CHAIRMAN	47	SILIGURI CORRIDOR	75
#Executive	47	#Locations #Internal Security	75
CHIEF JUSTICES NEED LONGER TENURE	48	PROTECTED AREA PERMIT REINSTATED IN MYANMAR	
#Judiciary	48	BORDERING STATES	75
CODE OF CONDUCT JUDGES NEED TO FOLLOW	49	#Inner Line Permit #Internal Security	75
#Judiciary	49	INDIA-MYANMAR BORDER FREE MOVEMENT REGIME	76
SHOULD ASSISTED DYING BE LEGALISED?	51	#Bilateral Relations	76
#Governance	51	CRIMINAL TRACKING NETWORK AND SYSTEMS	77
PRISONS IN INDIA: ISSUES & REFORMS	52	#Governance	77
#Governance reforms	52	INDIRA GANDHI PEACE PRIZE 2024	77
PRAGATI (PRO-ACTIVE GOVERNANCE AND TIMELY		#Awards	77
IMPLEMENTATION)	53		
#Governance	53	SOCIETY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE	80
PM CARES FUND	54	# GS PAPER I & GS PAPER II (MAIN)	80
#Government Institutions	54		
INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS & SECURITY	57	HOW TO NAVIGATE DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGES IN INDIA?	80
# GS PAPER (PRELIMS) & GS PAPER II & III (MAIN)	57	#Population Issues	80
INDIA-CHINA RELATIONS: DEVELOPMENTS & CHALLENGES	57	RISING NON-COMMUNICABLE DISEASE BURDEN	81
#Bilateral Relations #South Asia	57	#Health	81
SRI LANKAN PRESIDENT IS ON INDIA VISIT	59	UNIVERSAL HEALTH COVERAGE	82
#Neighbourhood #South Asia	59	#Health	82
SHEIKH HASINA EXTRADITION: INDIA'S OPTIONS	61	PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES: RIGHTS & ISSUES	83
#Bilateral Agreements #South Asia	61	#Vulnerable sections #PWDS	83
INDIA'S OBLIGATIONS TOWARDS ROHINGYA REFUGEES	62	NATIONAL POLICY ON FEMALE LABOUR FORCE PARTICIPATION	85
#International conventions and Human rights	62	#Vulnerable Sections #gender equality	85
NEPAL CHINA SIGN BRI FRAMEWORK	64	POSH ACT AND ITS APPLICABILITY TO POLITICAL PARTIES	86
#Bilateral Agreements	64	#Vulnerable Sections	86

HIGH DROPOUT RATES IN EKLAVYA MODEL RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS	87
#Vulnerable sections #education	87
END TO 'NO DETENTION POLICY' FOR CLASS 5TH AND 8TH	88
#Education	88
PM INTERNSHIP SCHEME	89
#Social Justice #Education	89
INDIA SKILLS REPORT 2025	90
#Labour #Employment	90

GEOGRAPHY, ENVIRONMENT, BIODIVERSITY & DISASTER MANAGEMENT 92

# GS PAPER (PRELIMS) AND GS PAPER I & III (MAIN)	92
INDIA STATE OF FOREST REPORT 2023	92
#Conservation	92
SACRED GROVES	94
#Conservation	94
STATES GOT ONLY 19% OF FUNDS SOUGHT FROM NDRF	95
#disastermanagement	95
KEN-BETWA LINK PROJECT	97
#Riverlinking #Infrastructure	97
POLAVARAM DAM PROJECT	99
#Infrastructure	99
INDIA'S CRITICALLY ENDANGERED SPECIES	100
#Biodiversity	100
RATAPANI TIGER RESERVE	101
#Conservation #Tiger reserve	101
INDIAN STAR TORTOISE	102
#Important Species	102
TOXINS OF BHOPAL GAS TRAGEDY 1984	103
#Industrial Disaster	103
WHAT IS SILICOSIS?	104
#Pollution	104
CARBON MARKET AND ITS WORKING	104
#Climate Change #Financial Interventions	104
MARINE CARBON DIOXIDE REMOVAL	105
#Climate Change	105
ACTIVE UNDERWATER HOT SPRING IN SOUTHERN INDIAN OCEAN	107
#Geographical features	107
LA NINA	108
#Geophysical Phenomenon	108
LAKE SNOW EFFECT	108
#Physical Phenomenon	108
SANTA ANA WINDS DRIVE WILDFIRE	109

#Climate Change #Wildfires	109
CHAMPIONS OF THE EARTH AWARD 2024	110
#Awards and Honours	110

SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY 112

# GS PAPER (PRELIMS) & GS PAPER III (MAIN)	112
GENE THERAPY FOR HAEMOPHILIA	112
#Biology and Biotechnology	112
IMMUNOTHERAPY FOR CANCER TREATMENT	113
#Biology and Biotechnology #Health	113
EXTRACHROMOSOMAL DNA	115
#Biology and Biotechnology	115
IDIOPATHIC PULMONARY FIBROSIS	115
#Biology & Biotechnology #Health	115
PROBA-3 MISSION	116
#Astronomy and Space Technology	116
PSLV-C60: SPADEX & POEM	117
#Astronomy and Space Technology	117
PARKER SOLAR PROBE'S CLOSEST APPROACH TO SUN	118
#Astronomy and Space Technology	118
SATELLITE INTERNET	119
#Internet and Communications Technology	119
INDIA TESTS NUCLEAR-CAPABLE BALLISTIC MISSILE	121
#Defence Technology	121
INS TUSHIL	122
#Defence Technology	122
K-9 VAJRA ARTILLERY GUN	122
#Defence Technology	122

HISTORY, HERITAGE & CULTURE 125

# GS PAPER (PRELIMS) & GS PAPER I (MAIN)	125
MAHA KUMBHA MELA	125
#artandculture #Festivals	125
NATIONAL MARITIME HERITAGE COMPLEX	126
#artandculture	126
USTAD ZAKIR HUSSAIN	127
#artandculture #Personalities in News	127
DALAI LAMA	128
#Personalities in News	128
PM TO RELEASE COLLECTED WORKS OF SUBRAMANIA BHARTI	128
#Modernhistory #Personalities in News	128
NAGALAND'S HORNBILL FESTIVAL	129
#Festivals	129
THANKA ANKI PROCESSION	129

#artandculture	129
THRISSUR POORAM	130
#artandculture #Festivals	130
NAANGIARKOOTHU	131
#Theatre #artandculture	131
PAPIER MACHE ART OF KASHMIR	131
#artandculture	131
MEHRAULI ARCHAEOLOGICAL PARK	132
#artandculture #Monuments	132

PART-2: ETHICS, INTEGRITY & APTITUDE

135

CHINA IS WORLD'S LARGEST DEBT COLLECTOR	136
---	-----

#Ethics in contemporary International Aid	136
CASE STUDIES FOR PRACTICE	138
MAINS GS PAPER IV	138

PART-3: ESSAYS OF THE MONTH 140

EDUCATING THE MIND WITHOUT EDUCATING OUR HEART IS NO EDUCATION AT ALL"	141
#Education	141
THE GREATEST GLORY IN LIVING LIES NOT IN NEVER FALLING, BUT IN RISING EVERY TIME WE FALL.	143
#Philosophical	143
VIOLENCE IS THE LAST REFUGE OF THE INCOMPETENT.	145
#PHILOSOPHICAL	145

PART ONE

CURRENT AFFAIRS

**logical .simple .targeted
analysis & explanation
of all relevant news of the month**

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

GS PAPER (PRELIMS) & GS PAPER III (MAIN)

NEED FOR NEW SEEDS ACT IN INDIA

#AGRICULTURE

PRIMARY
SOURCE THE HINDU

13th National Seed Congress (NSC) 2024 was held at the International Rice Research Institute South Asia Regional Centre (ISARC) in Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh. It urged the Centre government to revisit and modernise the Seeds Bill of 2004 and Seeds Policy of 2002 to incorporate the latest developments in the seed sector.

WHY IS A NEW SEEDS ACT AND POLICY NEEDED?

- The **Seed Act 1966**, the **National Seed Policy 2002** form the basis of promotion and regulation of Indian Seed Industry. They face several issues, including-

1. Outdated Provisions:

- Seeds Act 1966, and Seeds Rules, 1968, and existing National Seed Policy, 2002 **have not been revised** to align with advancements in seed technology.
- India's seed quality assurance system and **certification standards are much lower** than global benchmarks.

2. No clear definition of Seeds:

- Lack of clear definitions for "farmer seeds" and "commercial seeds" creates **policy ambiguities, intellectual property disputes**, quality control issues, and challenges in balancing rights of both farmers and commercial seed companies.

3. Issue with voluntary registration of Varieties:

- The current system allows voluntary registration of seed varieties, which leads to **discrepancies in seed quality and traceability**. Mandatory registration would enhance accountability.

4. Regulatory Issues and Poor implementation:

- License delay:** Companies developing new varieties of hybrid seeds have to wait for >3 years to get **required permissions from Centre and States** (obtain licences in every State). This delays **access to new technology**

for farmers. India needs a "**One Nation, One Licence**" policy to streamline approvals for hybrid seeds.

- Outdated legislations overlap between Central and State jurisdictions**, and the **inconsistent implementation of policies** across sectors lead to:

- High reliance of small farmers on informal seed systems (lower-quality seeds).
- Conflicts between proprietary technologies and farmers' rights.
- Conflicts over royalties and technology-sharing agreements.

- Lack of consensus on GM Crops and Technology-** delays self-sufficiency in critical sectors, like edible oil production. **E.g.**, India imports edible oil from Canada, U.S. and Brazil, etc., but they use genetically modified seeds.

- Limited Research and Development (R&D)** and over-dependence on **imported germplasm** for advanced hybrids.

- To preserve traditional seed varieties:** India has over 3,000 varieties of traditional rice and their seeds should be preserved.

CHANGES THAT NEW SEEDS ACT AND POLICY SHOULD INCORPORATE

- The Regulation should include** seed pricing, seed supply and decentralised seed planning/ production in addition to regulation of quality.
- Must uphold farmers' rights** of breeding, selecting, saving, using, exchanging, distributing and selling seeds.
- Simplified licensing** processes, strengthening IPR protections to uphold rights of companies and enhancing ease of doing business.
- Each license should be reviewed** after some years (3-5 years) and renewal should be allowed based on actual performance.
- Appropriate compensation clauses for speedy redressal to farmers** who have incurred losses due to

seed failure - this should be linked to an insurance system.

- **Strong punitive clauses** which act as deterrents, based on standard formulae to calculate penalties.
- **Multi-locational agronomic trials of seeds** before commercialisation to ensure region-specific performance.
- **Should exclude traditional practices of farmers** of seed production, sale and exchange from its purview.
- **Harmonisation of the new legislation** with Protection of Plant Variety and Farmers Rights Act (PPV & FR), 2001 and the Biodiversity Act, 2002.

WAY FORWARD

- **R&D in innovative seed technologies**, including hybrid and biofortified crops, stress-tolerant varieties, and accelerated breeding cycles.
- **Developing seed parks, enhancing seed entrepreneurship**, improving supply chains, and building capacity among farmers through PPP mode.
- **Utilising advanced technologies** and satellite data to optimise crop production. **E.g.,**
 - The Ministry of Agriculture has released an 'Abstract Compendium' and the 'Rice Fallow Webpage and Atlas' for Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, and West Bengal.
 - The atlas will use geospatial technology to map and analyse fallow lands in eastern India to optimise crop planning, enhance system intensification, and improve food security in the region.

The New Seeds Act and Policy must be in tune with the contemporary situation in the seeds sector and must incorporate the concerns of farmers.

FARMER ID

#AGRICULTURE #INCLUSIVEGROWTH



*The Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare has asked the states to organise camps to ensure a faster generation of **Farmer ID**, a critical component of the Digital Agriculture Mission.*

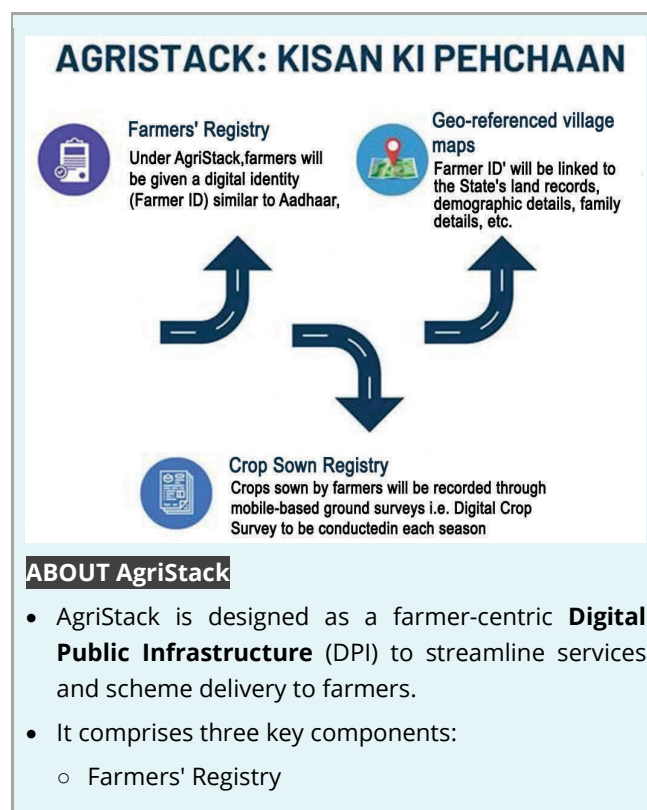
FARMER ID

- **Farmer ID** (also known as Kisan Pehchaan Patra) is an Aadhaar-linked Unique Digital Identity of the farmers.

- **Created and maintained by:** State Governments/ Union Territories.
- The IDs will be **linked to various farmer-related data** including:
 - Land records
 - Livestock ownership
 - Crops sown
 - Benefits and subsidies availed
 - Demographic and family details etc.
- The database created through the Farmer ID will be known as **Farmer' registry**. **It is one of the three registries under Agri Stack component** of the Centre's **Digital Agriculture Mission** for creation of digital public infrastructure in the farm sector.

BENEFITS OF FARMER ID

- **Targeted delivery:** Only legitimate and eligible farmers receive subsidies and benefits and eliminates duplication.
- **Precision agriculture:** Facilitates data-driven policy-making for better crop planning, insurance, and market linkages.
- **Empowerment:** Encourages financial inclusion by enabling easy access to credit and crop insurance.



- Geo-referenced village maps
- Crop Sown Registry
- AgriStack is a part of the **Digital Agriculture Mission (2021-2025)** which aims at modernisation of Indian agriculture. The three DPIs to be built under the Mission are Agristack, Krishi Decision Support System, and Soil Profile Mapping.

KEY TARGETS OF AgriStack INCLUDE

- Creating digital identities for **11 crore farmers** over three years (6 crore in FY 2024-25, 3 crore in FY 2025-26, and 2 crore in FY 2026-27).
- Launching **Digital Crop Survey nationwide**, within two years, covering 400 districts in FY 2024-25 and all districts in FY 2025-26.

WINDFALL TAX

#TAXATION



Union government scrapped a 30-month old windfall tax on domestically produced crude oil and export of jet fuel (ATF), diesel and petrol following a decline in international oil prices.

WINDFALL TAX

- It is a **higher tax levied by the government** on specific industries, when the industry experiences unexpected and above-average **profits**.
 - These **profits are separately taxed** which are over and above the normal taxes.
 - India **first imposed the windfall tax** on July 1, 2022, when crude oil prices were well over \$100 per barrel, following the Russia-Ukraine war.
- Country's upstream oil companies (ONGC, Oil India, GAIL) as well as private refiners (the key buyers of discounted Russian supplies) were **reaping major profits** by aggressively boosting fuel exports instead of domestic sales.

ECONOMIC RATIONALE FOR REMOVING WINDFALL TAX

- **Falling oil prices;** Global crude oil prices have been falling since June 2022, and are currently under \$75 per barrel. This has led to a decline in profits for domestic oil producers.

- **Relief to oil companies** by lifting their refining margins.
- **Relief to consumers** as it would lead to lower airfares for airlines, lower prices for petrol, diesel, and ATF for oil companies.
- **Reduced government revenue:** Windfall tax was not generating significant revenue, with collections dropping from ₹25,000 crore in FY23 to ₹6,000 crore in FY25.

HOUSE PRICE INDEX (HPI)

#INFLATION #INFRASTRUCTURE



All-India House Price Index (HPI) rose by 4.34% as of September 2024. The rising HPI shows that the **house prices are on the rise in India**, despite high interest rates in the banking system and inflation.

HOUSE PRICE INDEX

- **Released by:** Reserve Bank of India
- **Frequency:** Published quarterly.
- **Base year:** 2010-11
- **Coverage:** The Index **tracks the price movements of residential property** in **ten major cities** in India. (Ahmedabad, Bengaluru, Chennai, Delhi, Jaipur, Kanpur, Kochi, Kolkata, Lucknow, and Mumbai)
- **Data Source:** Official data of property price transactions collected from **registration authorities of respective state governments**.
- Based on these city indices, an **average house price index** representing all-India house price movement is also compiled.

UTILITY OF HOUSE PRICE INDEX

- Functions as an **analytical tool for estimating:**
 - Changes in rates of Real estate and mortgage defaults
 - Housing affordability
- Used by policymakers and banks to **assess the impact of monetary policy on the housing sector** and assists in **framing housing and urban development schemes**.

TIME TO REVIEW INFLATION TARGETING

#INFLATION #MONETARYPOLICY

PRIMARY SOURCE BusinessLine

*Despite extensive research and econometric studies, there is **no conclusive evidence** that inflation targeting is the most effective monetary policy framework.*

INFLATION TARGETING

- Inflation Targeting is a **monetary policy framework** where the **Central Bank** of a country aims to **maintain the rate of Inflation** within a targeted (pre-defined) range.
- India adopted inflation targeting through the **Monetary Policy Framework Agreement in 2015**, signed between the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) and the Central Government.
- **Objective:** To maintain price stability while keeping in mind the objective of growth.
- **Target:** RBI is required to **maintain inflation of 4%** (with deviation of $\pm 2\%$), i.e., between 2% to 6%.

NEED TO REVIEW INFLATION TARGETING

1. Inflation-Growth Dichotomy:

- Inflation targeting relies on contractionary monetary policy (**higher interest rates**) to control inflation. However, such a policy would lead to an **increase in rate of interest on loans**, will raise borrowing costs, reduce private investment and consumption expenditure, thereby causing a **decline in GDP growth rates**.

2. Persisting Inflation:

- In Inflation targeting, controlling the money supply only **alters demand-side inflation** but does not address the inflation caused by **supply-side** constraints.

E.g., Rise in prices of vegetables, pulses highlight supply side constraints, which are out of the purview of the RBI and hence they continue to erode household savings.

3. Inefficient Monetary Policy Transmission:

- Despite a cumulative hike in repo rate of 250 bps (during May 2022 to October 2023), banks revised their marginal cost of funds-based lending rate (MCLR) only by 152 bps. Hence, the **cost of credit still remains high**

for prospective borrowers, thereby discouraging capital investment.

WAY FORWARD

- **Shift to flexible inflation targeting:** Post-Global Financial crisis, the dominant view around the world is that **flexible inflation targeting (FIT)**, rather than pure inflation targeting is more efficient for monetary policy formulation. By FIT, during the times of extraordinary shocks (pandemics or financial crises) the Central bank could **temporarily adjust the inflation target** to allow for more economic flexibility.
- **Address supply-chain constraints:** Strengthening policy coordination with the government and undertaking structural reforms in the agriculture and developing efficient logistics and transport networks to address inflationary pressure due to supply-side shocks.

RESOLVING BASE YEAR CONUNDRUM IN NATIONAL ACCOUNTING

#NATIONAL ACCOUNTING

PRIMARY SOURCE The Indian EXPRESS

With India's GDP increasing from ₹98 lakh crore in FY14 to ₹173.8 lakh crore in FY24, the recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic has been uneven, and comparisons across different periods may be misleading due to significant base effects.

In this context, the choice of a base year for measuring economic variables becomes extremely important, as it can introduce biases that distort growth assessments.

BASE YEAR

- A base year is a reference year used to measure important economic indicators like:
 - Gross Domestic Product (GDP)
 - Consumer Price Index (CPI)
 - Wholesale Price Index (WPI)
 - Index of Industrial Production (IIP)

PURPOSE OF BASE YEAR

- **Base year serves as a fixed reference point** to measure changes in economic variables like GDP, IIP or CPI over time. It allows for meaningful comparisons of these indicators across different time periods.

- **To differentiate quantity from value:** Reference year is necessary to arrive at the right measure of production activities in the economy like GDP by removing the impact of inflation.
- **Ensures composition of indices** like CPI/WPI reflect contemporary consumption patterns.
- **Base year is used to fix the relative weights** of different goods and services in the calculation of various economic indicators.
- **Facilitating International Comparisons:** When countries use a common base year, it enables better comparison of economic indicators like GDP and inflation across different economies.

REVISION OF BASE YEAR

- Base year is **typically updated periodically** (E.g., every 5-10 years) to ensure the economic indicators remain representative of the current economic structure and consumption patterns.
- In India, the practice was to revise the base every 5 years, so as to coincide with quinquennial rounds of the NSSO. However, **since 2004-05, base year revision has been staggered** due to several reasons.
- Post the financial crisis of 2009-10, **2011-12 was chosen as the base year** and the updated series was released only in 2015.

NEED FOR REVISION OF BASE YEAR IN INDIA

- **Old basket of Goods:** We continue to monitor a basket of goods that includes torches, radios, tape recorders, CDs, DVDs, audio/video cassettes, and trunks, among some 300 other items which no longer reflect the consumption patterns of the public.
- **Disproportionate Weights:**
 - Weightage of food in the CPI basket has decreased from 60.9% (in 1960) to 57.0% (in 1982) and to around 45% (present), consistent with Engel's Law. This gradual decline indicates that as the economy grows, the proportion of income spent on food decreases. (**Engel's Law** suggests that as income rises, the proportion of income spent on food falls, even if the absolute expenditure on food rises)
 - Additionally, inflation data under-represents services in the consumption basket. In production, services are about 55% of the GDP but have no representation in WPI and about 24% in CPI.

CHALLENGES

- **Selecting Right Reference Year:**
 - The reference year must be a normal year with no significant volatility in GDP or Inflation and also be devoid of any structural reforms made in the economy like GST etc.
 - Keeping a year with too high growth or too low growth as base year, may eventually result in **high base effect** in the following years.
- **Lack of relevant Consumer Data:** A new nationwide consumer expenditure survey is long overdue. The last two such nationwide sample surveys were carried out in 2011-12 and 2017-18. Unfortunately, the results of the 2017-18 survey were not released on grounds of unexplained "data quality issues".

FERTILIZER SUBSIDIES: MECHANISM AND CHALLENGES

#AGRICULTURE #FERTILIZERS SUBSIDY

PRIMARY
SOURCE *The Indian
EXPRESS*

*The 10th World Soil Day was recently celebrated on December 5, 2024. The theme 'Caring for Soils – Measure, Monitor, and Manage' was appropriate as our **soils are becoming deficient in the essential nutrients** needed for healthy soils. The **role of the fertilizer industry is critical** in ensuring that our soils are healthy and well-nourished.*

STATE OF SOIL IN INDIA

- Topsoil (up to two to three cm in depth), which takes 1,000 years to form, is a **critical resource for Agriculture** as almost 95% of food currently produced comes from it.
- **Major essential nutrients** in a productive soil include nitrogen (N), phosphate (P) and potash (K).
 - Less than 5% of Indian soils **have high or sufficient nitrogen**.
 - Only 40% have sufficient phosphate.
 - Only 32% have sufficient potash.
 - Only 20% are sufficient in organic carbon.
- Our soils suffer from a **deficiency of micronutrients** like sulphur, iron, zinc, boron, etc.

HOW ARE FERTILIZERS SUBSIDISED IN INDIA?

- Fertilizers provide key nutrients (N, P and K) to the soil. Important fertilizers are- Urea (N based), DAP (P based) and MOP (K based).
- The Government of India has been **providing subsidised fertilizers** to the farmers since 1970's. Over the period the Government has devised separate mechanisms for Urea(N) Subsidy and Non urea (P, K) fertilizer subsidy.
- The allocation for fertilizer subsidy for FY24 was budgeted at **Rs 1.75 lakh crore in FY24**.

SUBSIDY MECHANISM FOR UREA

- Cost-Plus Method:** Under this method, the MRP of Urea is **statutorily fixed** by the Government of India and the difference between MRP and Cost of production is provided to the manufacturing company as subsidy. Different amounts are given to different manufacturers based on their Cost of production.
 - As this method encouraged the fertilizer companies to remain inefficient, **New Urea Policy (2015)** addressed this anomaly.
 - Under New Urea Policy (2015)** all the gas-based urea manufacturing plants are divided into three groups and a specific energy norm is fixed for each group. Urea plants falling in the same group will be getting the same amount of subsidy irrespective of their actual cost of production (actual consumption of energy). This will force plants to become more energy efficient.

SUBSIDY-MECHANISM FOR NON-UREA (P, K) FERTILIZERS

- Nutrient-Based Subsidy (NBS):** The market prices of these fertilizers are deregulated. Manufacturers are free to decide the market price at which they want to sell and they receive a **fixed subsidy** from the government based on the amount of nutrient (N, P & K) present in a given amount of fertilizer.
- NBS to be paid on each nutrient namely 'N', 'P', 'K' & 'Sulphur' would be decided (per kg) annually by the government. NBS, so decided, would be converted into a **subsidy per tonne** for each subsidised fertilizer.

- Under NBS Policy, **freight cost is also reimbursed** to the fertilizer companies on account of movement of P&K fertilizers.

DBT IN FERTILIZERS

- Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) model in fertilizers is different from the conventional system of DBT being implemented in LPG.
- Under this, **farmers would continue to get fertilizer at subsidised price** whereas the **fertilizer companies receive subsidy**, only after the fertilizers are sold to farmers by the retailers through Point of Sale (PoS) machines (linked to the Department of Fertilizers' e-Urvarak DBT portal) through biometric authentication by Aadhar Card.

ISSUES OF FERTILIZER SUBSIDIES

- Loss of Fertility:** Since the price of Urea is still regulated, it failed to achieve balanced use of fertilizers and resulted in loss of fertility of soil and pollution of water bodies.
- Diversion of subsidised fertilisers:** Illegal diversion of Subsidised fertilizers for other Industrial uses like manufacturing of plywood, textile dyes etc.
- Fertilizer subsidies are regressive:** Since rich farmers use more fertilizers, they end up getting more subsidies than small and marginal farmers.
- Increased subsidy burden on the government:** Fertilizer subsidy is one of the important items of revenue expenditure.
- Breaches WTO AoA limit:** Fertilizer subsidies are treated as Amber box subsidies and breach the WTO (Agreement on Agriculture) limit of 10%.
- Inverted Duty Structure:** Basic Custom Duty (BCD) and GST rates of finished fertilizers are more than the raw materials like Sulphuric Acid and Ammonia and Natural gas, a major input for fertilizers, remains outside GST.

WHAT ARE THE STEPS TAKEN BY THE GOVERNMENT TILL NOW?

- Reduced the size of the Urea bag** from 50 kg to 45 kg to prevent indiscriminate use.

- **Soil Health Card Scheme** promoted balanced use of N, P and K fertilizers (ideal ratio is 4:2:1)
- **Neem-coated Urea** not only prevented the illegal diversion of urea for Industrial use but also improved nitrogen-use efficiency by slowing the release of nitrogen and thereby reducing the consumption.
- **Introduction of Nano Urea:**
 - **Nano Urea** contains nitrogen in the form of granules that are a hundred thousand times finer than a sheet of paper. At this 'nano' scale, which is about a billionth of a metre, materials behave differently than in the visible realm.
 - Nano Urea when applied on to the leaves, stimulates a range of enzymes, like nitrase and nitrite reductase, which helps plants metabolise nitrogen.
- **New Urea Policy (2015):**
 - Maximising indigenous urea production.
 - Promoting energy efficiency in urea production.
 - Rationalising subsidy burden on the government.
 - Encouraged Organic farming through "Paramparagat Krishi Vikas Yojana."
- **One Nation One Fertilizer (ONOF):** Under this scheme, all types of fertilizers, whether it is DAP, NPK or urea will be sold under the brand name of 'Bharat'. This will standardise fertilizer brands across the nation irrespective of the company that manufactures it.
- **PM Program for restoration, awareness, nourishment & amelioration of mother earth (PM-PRANAM)** is aimed at incentivising the states to promote balanced use of fertilizers by reducing chemical based fertilizers.

WAY FORWARD

- **Deregulating MRP of Urea** and **paying a fixed per-tonne subsidy** linked to its nutrient content of 46% Nitrogen.
- **Introduce Direct cash transfer method of subsidy** (on the lines of LPG subsidy) where farmers can purchase the fertilizers at the market price and the

government would transfer the cash amount in the farmers account. This will help in rationalising the subsidy burden on the government.

- **Triangulating data** on fertiliser sales, soil health cards (SHC), PM-KISAN, land records, crops grown, bank accounts and mobile numbers of farmers should be undertaken for seamless implementation of DBT mechanism in fertiliser subsidy.
- **De-Canalization of Urea imports:** At present Urea is imported only by government agencies. Allowing private agencies to import the urea will increase competition and reduce the price.
- **Encourage Bio fertilizers and Fertigation techniques** to reduce chemical fertilizers consumption.
- **Reduce GST rate and customs duty** for raw materials such as Sulphuric Acid and Ammonia for P&K fertilizers to at least 5%.
- **Bringing Natural Gas** under the ambit of GST.
- **Need to create separate tariff code** for Urea being used for non-agricultural purposes.

RBI DEVELOPS AI TOOL TO DETECT MULE ACCOUNTS

#BANKING #GOVERNANCE

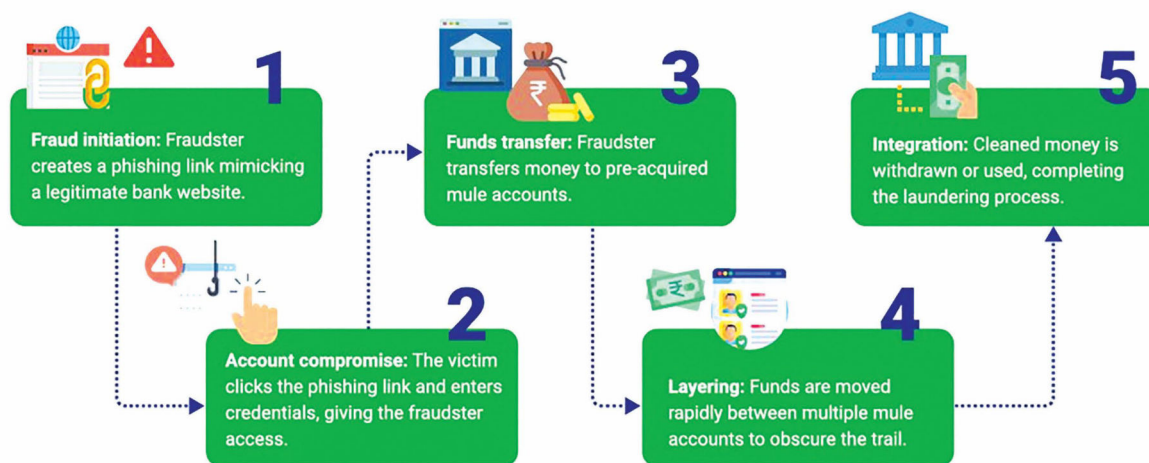


RBI has created an artificial intelligence (AI) powered model 'MuleHunter.AI' that could **reduce digital fraud** by helping banks deal with the increasing problem of "mule" bank accounts.

WHAT ARE MULE ACCOUNTS?

- **Mule account:** A bank account that is used by criminals to launder illicit funds. Such accounts are often set up by individuals who are either unknowingly recruited through promises of easy money or coerced into participating in illegal activities.
- While high valued transactions are routinely screened as per the **Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA)**, mule accounts are very difficult to track.

How financial fraud happens using mule accounts?



D91 Research & Visualisation by D91 Labs

WHO IS THE MONEY MULE?

- **Money Mule:** Term used to **describe innocent victims** who are **duped by fraudsters** into laundering stolen/illegal money via their bank account(s).
- **Money mule becomes the target of police investigations** because it is their accounts that are involved, while the actual criminals remain undetectable.

WHAT IS MULEHUNTER.AI?

- MuleHunter.AI is an AI-model that **enables detection of mule bank accounts** being used for committing financial frauds.
- **Developed by:** Reserve Bank Innovation Hub (RBIH), Bengaluru (a subsidiary of the RBI).
- The tool has undergone successful **pilot testing at two public sector banks** that has yielded encouraging results.
- **Benefits:** As compared to conventional rule-based systems, advanced machine learning algorithms can anticipate **mule accounts more quickly and accurately** by analysing datasets pertaining to transactions and account details.

BIMA SAKHI YOJANA

#FINANCIAL INCLUSION

PRIMARY
SOURCE THE HINDU

***Bima Sakhi Yojana** of Life Insurance Corporation was launched for women empowerment by enhancing financial literacy and financial inclusion.*

KEY FACTS ABOUT BIMA SAKHI YOJANA

- **Initiative of:** Life Insurance Corporation (LIC)
- **Aim:** To empower women through financial literacy and insurance awareness.
- **Target:** Enrol 100,000 Bima Sakhi in 12 months to financially empower women and 200,000 over a period of three years as part of women empowerment drive.
- **Beneficiaries:** Women in the age group of **18-70 years**, who are Class-10 pass.
- **Key features:** Women will receive specialised training and a **stipend for the first three years**.
 - **Monthly stipend** during the training: ₹7,000 in the first year, ₹6,000 in the second year, and ₹5,000 in the third year.
 - Following the completion of the training, women can serve as LIC agents and the graduate Bima Sakhis would have the opportunity to qualify for development officer roles in LIC.
 - Each Bima Sakhi will have a target of insuring **2 individuals** every month or **24 individuals** in a year to earn the commission.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE SCHEME

- Helps to **bridge the gap in insurance penetration** in rural and semi-urban areas.

- **Foster financial independence among women** while expanding LIC's outreach in promoting insurance as a tool for economic security.

HURDLES TO CHINA PLUS ONE OPPORTUNITY

#MANUFACTURING #INDUSTRIAL GROWTH

PRIMARY
SOURCE THE HINDU

NITI Aayog in its inaugural quarterly report 'Trade Watch' has highlighted that India's has seen limited success in seizing 'China plus one' opportunity.

WHAT IS THE CHINA PLUS ONE STRATEGY?

China Plus One is the business strategy to avoid investing only in China and diversify business or channel investments into manufacturing in other developing economies such as **India, Thailand, Cambodia, Vietnam, Malaysia etc.**

SHIFT FROM CHINA

- For the last 20 years, Western companies have heavily invested in China, drawn in by its low production costs, and vast domestic consumer market.
- However the companies are looking to diversify due to-
 - **US-China Trade disputes:** Escalating trade disputes and reciprocal trade restrictions have disrupted global supply chains.
 - **Higher Tariffs and Trade restrictions:** Cost of doing business in China is increasing due to higher tariffs on Chinese imports and export restrictions on essential resources.
 - **COVID-19 Pandemic** exposed the supply-chain vulnerabilities of over-reliance on one country and the need to find alternative supply chains.
 - **Emerging competitors:** ASEAN and other developing countries are presenting attractive alternatives to China owing to their **lower tariffs, simpler tax systems, cheaper labor, and proactive free trade agreements (FTAs).**

WHY IS INDIA LAGGING BEHIND COMPETITORS?

In contrast to Vietnam, Thailand, Cambodia, and Malaysia, India has had very modest success utilising the China Plus One strategy. The reasons include-

- **Internal Policy challenges:**

- **Policy uncertainty:** Poor ease of doing business and greater amount of **policy uncertainty** deters foreign investors.
- **Cumbersome land acquisition** procedure and unavailability of cheap land.
- **Delays in receiving permits, licenses,** and approvals due to the involvement of multiple government agencies.
- **Complex tax laws** and **limited Free Trade Agreements (FTAs)** with major trade blocs.

- **Infrastructure challenges:** Deficient infrastructure including transportation, power supply shortages impacts the reliability of India's manufacturing sector/prospects.
- **Fragmented Labour laws:** Variation of labour laws across different states and delayed implementation of New Labour Codes.
- **Higher Logistics Cost:** India's logistics cost is 14% of India's GDP, which is high when compared to developed nations (where it ranges 8-10%). This reduces overall competitiveness.
- **Low R&D and Innovation:** India spends hardly around 0.7% of its GDP on R&D, quite lower in comparison to the USA (2.1%), China (2.8%), Israel (4.3%) etc.
- **Skilled Human Resources:** Despite having almost 53% of the population in the working-age group, there is a lack of availability of skilled human resources, adept in complex manufacturing processes.
- **Trade Facilitation Issues:** In India, Trade facilitation as measured by "Trading Across Borders" is quite poor. Complex documentation processes and high export costs hinder trade facilitation.

WAY FORWARD

- **Improve Trade Competitiveness** by improving access to factors of production (Land, Labour, Capital), Reduce Logistics costs (14% of GDP) to global benchmarks (8% of GDP), improving Ease of Doing Business by streamlining regulations etc.
- **Fast-track development of infrastructure projects** under the National Infrastructure Pipeline (NIP). Leverage PM Gati Shakti Master Plan to integrate infrastructure planning and bring down logistics cost.
- **Focus on large-scale skills development,** leveraging Skill India Program and Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana.

- **Expedite signing of Free Trade agreements** with key markets such as the European Union, United Kingdom & ASEAN.
- **Protect domestic markets** from the import of cheap foreign goods through (a) strong and effective technical regulations (b) trade safeguards such as Anti-dumping duties.
- **Enhance digital governance** and increase public and private spending on **R&D** to at least 1.5% of GDP by 2030.

SWITZERLAND REVOKES INDIA'S MFN STATUS

#TRADE RELATIONS

PRIMARY
SOURCE BusinessLine

Switzerland has withdrawn the **Most Favoured Nation (MFN)** status of India accorded to India under the **Double Taxation Avoidance Agreement** or DTAA treaty.

MAJOR HIGHLIGHTS

- This decision comes after an adverse ruling from the **Indian Supreme Court** (2023) regarding a tax dispute involving Nestlé (the Swiss food giant).
- In reciprocation to the decision, Switzerland invoked '**Principle of Reciprocity**' and **unilaterally** withdrew MFN status of India.
- From January 1, 2025, **Switzerland will levy a 10% tax** (instead of the current 5%) on dividends payable to Indian tax residents and entities who claim refunds for Swiss withholding tax.

WHAT IS MFN AND THE PRINCIPLE OF RECIPROCITY?

- Most Favoured Nation (MFN) status if given to a nation allows concessions in tax rates and tariffs. MFN works on the **principle of reciprocity** i.e., quid pro quo principle where both nations enjoy MFN status of each other.
 - MFN status is one of the cornerstones of the **World Trade Organisation (WTO) trade law**.
 - Each member of WTO **treats all the other members equally** as "most-favoured" trading partners.

ABOUT DOUBLE TAXATION AVOIDANCE AGREEMENT (DTAA)

- DTAA is an understanding between two nations to **reduce tax rate over already paid tax** in one of the partner nations.
- DTAA allows reduction in tax compliance of the multinational firm working in both partner nations as it reduces cascading impact on tax, enhancing ease of doing business.

INDIAN-SWITZERLAND TRADE RELATIONS

- Switzerland's investment flows in India amounted to **\$9.9 billion** from 2003 to 2023.
- As per the International Monetary Fund, Swiss investment stocks in India amount to \$35 Billion in 2023.

IMPACTS OF MFN WITHDRAWAL

- **Tax burden on Indian Firms:** As a result of MFN withdrawal, Switzerland will impose a **10% withholding tax** on Indian entities. Higher tax liabilities would reduce profit margins.
- **Reduced investor Confidence:** Discourage Swiss business and investors from engaging with Indian entities due to increased tax liabilities.
- **Negatively Impact global position:** Potentially affect ongoing Free Trade Agreement negotiations with the European Union.
- **Increased regulatory barriers:** Spill over effect into other trade dynamics leading to sanitary and phytosanitary compliance burden in sectors like pharmaceuticals.
- **Loss of competitive edge** to other competitive nations like China which can fill the vacuum of Swiss trade and investment.

WAY FORWARD

- **Renegotiating DTAA:** DTAA needs to be renegotiated to clarify the MFN terms and establish a body for a neutral arbitration mechanism to avoid arbitrary interpretation of trade clauses.
- **Enhanced investment protection mechanisms** like Bilateral Investment Protection Treaties to foster the confidence among the investors and to promote bilateral trade.
- **Fasttrack India-EFTA trade agreement:** Concluding EFTA will ensure new trade avenues to India ensuring mutual trade benefits with partner nations.

- **Strengthening Domestic Competitiveness:** Reducing regulatory barriers and improving Ease of doing business will help attract foreign investments.
- **Digital and financial reforms:** Adopting blockchain in trade agreements and developing fintech partnerships will boost trust and flexibility in the trade relations.

Switzerland withdrawal of India's MFN status highlights challenges in bilateral trade, including increased tax rates and investment uncertainties. Strengthening dialogue and trust can ensure resilient, mutually beneficial economic ties for long-term growth and stability.

WTO AGREEMENT ON FISHERIES SUBSIDIES

#SUBSIDIES #INTERNATIONAL AGREEMENTS
PRELIMS NUGGETS

PRIMARY
SOURCE THE HINDU

WTO's Chair of the Negotiating Group reported that due to India's continued objections to the draft text of the **WTO Fisheries Subsidy Pact**, the year-end deadline (2024) for concluding the pact cannot be met.

ABOUT THE WTO AGREEMENT ON FISHERIES SUBSIDIES

- World Trade Organisation's (WTO) agreement was adopted at the 12th Ministerial Conference (MC12) on 17 June 2022.
- It is being considered as a major step towards **ocean sustainability by prohibiting harmful fisheries subsidies**, a key contributor in the widespread depletion of the world's fish stocks.
- **Key achievements of the Agreement:**
 - First WTO agreement to focus on the environment.
 - First broad, binding, multilateral agreement on ocean sustainability.
 - Only the second agreement reached at the WTO since its inception.
- **Operationalisation:** For the Agreement to become operational, **two-thirds of members** have to deposit their "instruments of acceptance" with the WTO.

WHY IS THE AGREEMENT NEEDED?

- **United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) Report, 2022:**

- Over one-third of global marine fish stocks have fallen to biologically unsustainable levels.
- Overfishing and subsidies result in a loss of about **\$88.9 billion** in forgone net benefits annually.

KEY PROVISIONS OF THE DRAFT AGREEMENT

1. Prohibitions:

- **IUU Fishing & overfished stocks:** It will **prohibit subsidies** from being provided for Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing and overfished stocks.

****An overfished stock is a population of fish that is too low. A stock that is experiencing overfishing has an annual rate of catch that is too high. Therefore the population cannot support that level of fishing and is below that level is deemed "overfished."**

- **High Sea Fishing:** Prohibits providing **subsidies for fishing on high seas**, which are outside the jurisdiction of coastal countries and Regional Fisheries Management Organisations/ Arrangements.

2. Special and Differential Treatment (S&DT):

- **Transition Period:** Under S&DT, Developing countries and Least Developed countries (LDCs) will be allowed a transition period of two years from the date of entry into force of this Agreement.
- **Capacity Building:** Targeted technical assistance and capacity building assistance to developing countries and LDC Members.

3. Exceptions:

- No prohibition has been imposed on a WTO Member regarding **granting or maintaining subsidy to its vessel or operator** as long as it is not carrying out IUU.
- No prohibition on providing subsidies for overfished stocks as long as such subsidies are implemented to **rebuild the stock to a biologically sustainable level.**

INDIA'S STAND

1. Key Arguments of India:

- **Low Subsidy levels:** India is one of the lowest fisheries subsidisers (**\$35 per year per fisher** compared to some developed countries offering \$76,000 per fisher per year).
- **Sustainable practices:** India's fisheries sector primarily depends on several millions of small-scale and traditional fishers and does not exploit the resources indiscriminately like other advanced fishing nations.

- **Disproportionate conditions:** The proposed agreement imposes stringent conditions on small-scale fishers (particularly in developing countries) but did not effectively discipline the large-scale, industrial fishing operations (primarily responsible for overfishing and depletion of marine resources).
- **Sustainability exemption clause is problematic** as it allows advanced fishing countries with better monitoring and notification capabilities to avoid commitments to cut harmful subsidies. This discriminates against poorer countries that lack such capacities, even if they fish sustainably.

2. India's Demands:

- **Polluter pay Principle:** WTO Members who have provided huge subsidies in the past, and engaged in large-scale industrial fishing should take more obligations to prohibit subsidies based on the '*polluter pay principle*' and '*common but differentiated responsibilities*'.
- **Equitable transition period:** A 25-year transition period for developing countries that are neither covered by the de minimis (a global share of marine catch not greater than 0.8%), nor considered least developed countries (LDCs).

CONCLUSION: The WTO Agreement is grossly unjust and inimical to the interests of the fishers in the developing and less developed countries, especially for small scale fishers. WTO must address concerns of developing nations by encouraging consensus-based solutions and emphasising principles of equity, fairness, and common but differentiated responsibilities.

SOVEREIGN GREEN BONDS

#FINANCIAL INSTRUMENTS #GREEN FINANCE



Recently, the ₹5,000-crore auction of the new **Sovereign Green Bond (SGrB)** with **30-year tenure** was concluded successfully. It is a notable improvement over the weak response to the Sovereign Green Bonds with 10-year tenure (the investors bid for these bonds at a lower price due to their relatively illiquid nature).

WHAT ARE SOVEREIGN GREEN BONDS?

- Sovereign Green Bonds are **fixed interest-bearing financial instruments** issued by any sovereign entity / inter-governmental organisation / corporation.

- **Proceeds** of these bonds are used only for **environmentally conscious, climate-resilient projects**. This includes:
 - Investments in solar/wind/biomass/hydropower energy projects (under 25 MW) that integrate energy generation and storage
 - Public lighting improvements (E.g., replacement with LEDs)
 - Supporting construction of new low-carbon buildings
 - Energy-efficiency retrofits to existing buildings
 - Projects to reduce electricity grid losses etc.
- The bonds are **issued at a premium** to facilitate **access to cheaper capital** for environment-friendly projects.
- There is **no cap on foreign investment** in these bonds because these instruments are considered as **specified securities** under the **fully accessible route**.
- The proceeds will be deposited to the **Consolidated Fund of India** (CFI) in line with the regular treasury policy, and then funds from the CFI will be made available for eligible green projects.
- There are **no specific tax benefits** provided for investment in sovereign green bonds.

Note:

- In January 2023, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) auctioned its **maiden sovereign green bonds** worth ₹8,000 crore under its Sovereign Green Bond Framework.
- RBI has facilitated **wider non-resident participation in the Sovereign Green Bonds** by permitting eligible foreign investors in the International Financial Services Centre (IFSC) to invest in such bonds.

JALVAHAK SCHEME

#INFRASTRUCTURE



Union Government has recently launched "**Jalvahak**" scheme to incentivise movement of cargo along the inland waterways, reduce logistics cost and de-congest roads and railways.

PRESENT STATUS OF INLAND WATERWAYS

- India has approximately 14,500 km of navigable waterways which consist of rivers, canals, backwaters, creeks, etc.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

- However, the share of Inland waterway transport (IWT) in India is currently only around 2% in comparison to 35% in Bangladesh and 20% in Germany.

BENEFITS OF INLAND WATERWAYS

- **Reduce Logistics cost** (12-14% of GDP) and bring it on par with the global standards (8-10% of GDP).
- **Lower Investment** and maintenance cost in comparison to road and railways.
- **Environment Friendly:**
 - 50% lower carbon dioxide emissions in comparison to Roads.
 - Negligible land requirement.
 - Safe mode for hazardous cargo.

Streamline Infrastructure:

- Reduces pressure on Roads and Railways.
- Provide for carriage of vehicles in the form of Roll-on-roll-off mode.
- Easy integration of the IWT with sea transport.
- Safe and less risky in comparison to other modes.

- **Socio-economic development:** IWT provides benefits in terms of trade and access to markets, enhance local community's economic engagement, promote eco-tourism and boost employment opportunities. For example, Arth Ganga has potential to promote sustainable development with a focus on economic activities along river Ganga.

CONSTRAINTS AND STRATEGIES

Challenges	Strategies (NIT Aayog's India @75 Strategy Document)
<p>Modal mix: Roads (54 per cent) continue to be the dominant mode of transporting cargo, followed by rail (33 per cent). Transportation of cargo through waterways - shipping and inland water - accounts for a minuscule modal share (6 per cent) despite it being the most cost effective and efficient mode.</p> <p>Inadequate discharges in the rivers during lean season resulting in inadequate fairway with depth and width required for round the year operation of IWT vessels of reasonable size</p> <p>Draught levels: Most Indian container handling Dorts lack the capability to handle large container vessels due to inadequate depth; a minimum draft depth of 18 metres is needed to enable mother vessels to dock at ports.</p> <p>Connectivity to ports: Weak hinterland connectivity between production centres and gateway ports</p> <p>Technical issues in inland waterways: The varving and limited depths due to the meandering of alluvial rivers and the erosion of their banks causing excessive siltation, lack of cargo earmarked for IWT, non-mechanized navigation lock systems and insufficient unloading facility at terminals hinder the use of IWT by shippers.</p> <p>Other constraints include lack of adequate terminal facilities, shortage of IWT vessels, bridges with low vertical clearance, lack of level playing field with Railways in terms of Tariffs.</p>	<p>Develop measures for year-round navigation: Efforts should be made to develop deeper stretches of the river, i.e., at least 2.5 m to 3 m.</p> <p>Open up India's dredging market: At present, the Dredging Corporation of India (DCI) and a limited set of private vendors serve the Indian dredging market, limiting competition. Enhance last mile connectivity to inland waterways:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • IWT should be integrated to multimodal/ intermodal connectivity. • Promote industrial corridors along riverbanks and foster waterways-based industrialisation. <p>Facilitate access to capital for inland vessels: Financing for inland vessels could be made part of priority sector lending by banks. incentivising cargo transport through inland waterways:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offer incentives such as subsidies for transporting cargo through IWT. • Public sector entities such as Food Corporation of India, power plants and refineries can be used to use IWT. • Higher road taxes can be levied on transportation of coal and inflammable material over longer distances. <p>Promoting passenger transportation and tourism: Promotion of River Cruise Tourism on River Ganga, Brahmaputra, Goa & Kerala waterways.</p>

DETAILS ABOUT JALVAHAK SCHEME

- **Rationale:** Need to provide incentives on the lines of Europe's Marcopolo initiative to encourage modal shift towards Inland waterways from better funded and developed Road and Railways sector.
- **Duration of scheme:** 3 years.
- **Implementation agency:** Inland and Coastal Shipping Limited (ICSL)
- **Nodal Ministry:** Ministry of Shipping, Ports, and Inland Waterways.

DESIGN OF THE SCHEME

- Financial incentives will be provided directly to the cargo owners who shift cargo from road/rail to Inland waterways.
- Incentive would be up to 35% of the total actual operating expenditure incurred on waterways.
- Incentive would be provided only on long haul movement of cargo i.e. distances more than 300 km.

IS THE INCENTIVE APPLICABLE FOR ALL THE INLAND WATERWAYS?

- Presently, the incentives are applicable for movement of cargo along National Waterways 1 (river Ganga), National Waterways 2 (Brahmaputra river) and National Waterways 16 (River Barak). However, based on the success of the Scheme, it may also be extended to other waterways.

The inland waterways are cost-effective, fuel-efficient, safe and secure mode of transportation for goods and passengers. Going forward, the Jalvahak scheme should be implemented efficiently to increase the modal share of inland waterways from 2% to 5% as envisioned in Maritime India Vision 2030.

AMENDMENTS IN INSURANCE ACTS AND COMPOSITE LICENSE

#FINANCIAL INCLUSION



Government has sought to **introduce amendments** in the Insurance laws to **increase the Insurance penetration** and reform the insurance sector to make it more competitive.

However, these amendments may go against the interests of public sector Insurance companies.

INSURANCE SECTOR IN INDIA

- **Present Status:**
 - Insurance sector is regulated under the **Insurance Act, 1938**. The sector can be divided into Life Insurance and General Insurance (Health, Motor etc.).
 - Both Public sector and Private sector companies are allowed to offer Insurance in India.
- **Public sector Insurance Companies.**
 - **Life Insurance Corporation Act of 1956** nationalised the life insurance business by transferring it to Life Insurance Corporation.
 - **General Insurance Business (Nationalisation) Act, 1972 (GIBNA)** nationalised the general insurance business in India and regulates 4 general insurance companies- New India Assurance, United India Insurance, Oriental Insurance company and National Insurance Company.
- **Private sector Insurance Companies:**
 - IRDA Act, 1999 allowed Private sector participation in the Insurance sector. India also allows FDI of up to 74% in Insurance.
- **Insurance Penetration and Density:**
 - Insurance penetration is measured as the ratio of insurance premium to GDP. While insurance density is calculated as the ratio of Insurance premium to population (per capita premium).
 - India's overall Insurance penetration is around 4% while the Insurance density is around \$70.

PROPOSED AMENDMENTS IN INSURANCE ACTS

- **Composite License:** As per the provisions of the Insurance Act, 1938, life insurance companies can only offer life insurance products, while general insurance companies can offer non-life insurance products, such as health, motor insurance etc. Hence, **IRDAI does not allow composite licensing** for insurance companies, which means that an insurance company cannot offer both life and non-life insurance products under one entity. Draft amendments allow composite licences for Insurance companies.
- **Foreign investment:** Increase in FDI cap on Insurance from 74% to 100%.

- **Requirement of capital:** The 1938 Act provides capital requirements for different classes of insurance business. The amendment provides that for entities engaged in more than one class of insurance business, the IRDAI may specify the capital requirements. This should not be less than the sum of capital required for carrying out each class of business separately. In addition, IRDAI can also reduce the minimum capital required to up to Rs 50 crore. This can be done for insurers serving underserved or special segments prescribed through regulations.

CONCERNS WITH RECENT PROPOSALS

- Presently, LIC can offer only Life Insurance under LIC Act, 1956 (and not General Insurance). Similarly, 4 General Insurance Companies can provide only General Insurance (and not Life Insurance) under the General Insurance Business (Nationalisation) Act, 1972 (GIBNA). Hence, the Government needs to amend the LIC Act and GIBNA **to enable composite licensing** for public sector Insurance Companies. However, no such amendments have been proposed.
- A composite licensing regime would **allow only the private sector companies** to offer both Life Insurance and General Insurance. However, the public sector insurance companies would not be able to get a composite license. This would **hinder public sector insurance companies from competing with the Private sector Insurance companies**.

WRITTEN OFF ASSETS OF THE BANKS

#BANKING AND FINANCE

PRIMARY SOURCE The Indian EXPRESS

According to RBI, the banks have written off loans worth Rs 10 lakh crores in the last 5 years leading to fall in NPA to 12-year low of 2.8%. However, Banks have recovered only 18% of the written off loans. Banks were unable to recover 82% of the remaining loans despite adopting various recovery measures.

NON-PERFORMING ASSET (NPA)

- A loan is categorised as NPA if it is due for a period of more than 90 days. Depending upon the due period, the NPAs are categorized as under:
 - **Sub-Standard Assets:** >90 days and less than 1 year.
 - **Doubtful Assets:** greater than 1 year.
 - **Lost Assets:** loss has been identified by the bank or RBI.

RBI'S CONCEPT OF WILFUL DEFAULT

Person/company defaults on loan repayment:

- Despite having the capacity to repay loans.
- Diverts the loan for some other purpose. **E.g.,** Kingfisher Airlines owned by Vijay Mallya diverted the loans for other related businesses such as Kingfisher Calendar and Formula 1 racing Team.
- Siphoning of funds. **E.g.,** Nirav Modi took loans for business operations but used the loans for personal purposes.
- Sell off the collateral without the knowledge of the Bank.

WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN DIVERSION AND SIPHONING OF LOANS?

In case of "Diversion of Loans", loans are used for related businesses. However, in case of "Siphoning", loans are used for unrelated businesses or personal purposes.

RECOVERY MEASURES

Prudential Framework for the Resolution of Stressed Assets (2019)		
Restructuring	Compromise Settlement	Technical Write-offs
Lender grants certain concessions to the borrower 1. Reduce Principal Amount (Part Settlement and the remaining amount must be paid over a period, generally more than 3 months).	Negotiated arrangement with the borrower to fully settle the claims of the Bank against the borrower in cash. It is called as Full settlement as the amount must be paid within 3 months and account gets closed.	Accounting practice adopted by the Banks to cleanse their balance sheets. Bank would write-off the loan only for the purpose of accounting.

For example, if there is NPA of Rs 100 crores, then Bank can undertake restructuring and grant concessions of Rs 20 crores. The borrower would still be required to repay Rs 80 crores over a period (More than 3 months).	For example, if there is NPA of Rs 100 crores, then Bank can enter into compromise settlement to pay Rs 80 crores within 3 months.	No waiver of claims against the borrower i.e., borrower would still be required to repay the debt. Bank would still recover the loan.
2. Reduce Interest amount		
3. Increase the Maturity period		
4. Sanction additional credit.		

WHY DO BANKS WRITE-OFF LOANS?

- The Bank removes the written off loan from its balance sheet and reports the amount as a loss. Hence, the Banks can show lower profits and hence reduce their tax liability.
- E.g.,** Let's say, the Bank has total profits worth Rs 1000 crores and written off loans worth Rs 100 crores. Then the **Net profits (Profits- Written off loans)** of the Bank would be Rs 900 crores. Thus, the Bank would be required to pay tax on Rs 900 crores (and not Rs 1000 crores).

RECENT CONTROVERSY OVER RBI'S FRAMEWORK FOR COMPROMISE SETTLEMENT AND TECHNICAL WRITE-OFFS (2023)

- Under this framework, Banks can **undertake compromise settlements or technical write-offs** of loans of wilful/fraud defaulters. Further, the RBI also allowed wilful defaulters or a company involved in fraud to get fresh loans after 12 months of executing a compromise settlement.
- It is considered to be a **detrimental step** as it only rewards wilful/fraud defaulters but also sends a wrong message to the honest borrowers who strive to meet their financial obligations.

CREDIT GUARANTEE SCHEME FOR E-NWR BASED PLEDGE FINANCING

#AGRICULTURAL CREDIT



Central Government launched a Credit Guarantee Scheme which provides a corpus of Rs 1,000-crore for **post-harvest**

finance availed by farmers against electronic negotiable warehouse receipts (e-NWRs).

WHAT ARE CREDIT GUARANTEE SCHEMES?

- Credit Guarantee refers to a situation where the loan to the applicant is backed by a party without the need for any external collateral or third-party guarantee.
- Here, the loan sanctioned by the member lending institution is backed by the scheme which provides the guarantee cover for a large portion of the loan amount.

ELECTRONIC-NEGOTIABLE WAREHOUSE RECEIPTS (E-NWR)

- Negotiable warehouse receipt (NWR) system, launched in 2011, allows transfer of ownership of a commodity stored in a warehouse without having to deliver it physically.
- An e-NWR is **available only in electronic form**. These receipts are issued in negotiable form, making them eligible as collateral.
- Warehousing Development and Regulatory Authority (WDRA)** regulates the entire operation under NWR.

ABOUT CREDIT GUARANTEE SCHEME FOR E-NWR BASED PLEDGE FINANCING

- Objective:** To help farmers easily access post-harvest loans by leveraging electronic warehouse receipts.
- Total Corpus:** Rs. 1000 Crores
- Coverage:** Loans up to Rs. 75 lakhs for agricultural purpose; up to Rs. 200 Lakhs for non-agricultural purpose.
- Eligible Institutions:** All scheduled banks and all cooperative banks.
- Eligible Borrowers:** Small and Marginal Farmers, Women, SC/ST/PwD Farmers, other farmers, MSMEs, Traders, FPOs and Farmer cooperatives.
- Risks covered:** Credit and warehouseman risks.

- **Guarantee coverage:**
 - 85% for loans up to Rs. 3 Lakhs.
 - 80% for loan between Rs. 3 to 75 lakhs for small and marginal farmers/ women/ SC/ ST/ PwD
 - 75% for other borrowers.

BENEFITS OF THE SCHEME

- **Increase post-harvest lending:** Currently, post-harvest lending stands at Rs. 40,000 crore out of total agricultural lending of Rs 21 lakh. Lending against e-NWRs is just Rs 4000 crore.
- **Improved Trust for Banks:** It addresses the default arising out of both Credit risk and Warehouseman risk.
- **Access to Vulnerable Section:** The scheme majorly focuses on Small and Marginal Farmers, Women, SC, ST and Divyangjan (PwD) farmers with a minimal guarantee fee.
- **Avoid distress selling by farmers:** Currently, farmers are compelled to sell their produce even if the price crashes, to get money to invest in the next cycle of crops. As this scheme takes off, farmers can submit their produce and get issued e-NWRs which will act as collateral for banks to issue required loans. Farmers can sell their produce when the price goes up.

ALTERNATIVE INVESTMENT FUNDS

#FINANCIAL MARKETS



Alternative Investment Funds (AIFs) have emerged as a key instrument for high-net-worth individuals and institutional investors in India as they facilitate investment in high-risk, high-return ventures. However, concerns have surfaced regarding their misuse to bypass financial regulations.

ABOUT ALTERNATIVE INVESTMENT FUNDS (AIFs):

- **Definition:** AIFs are private investment vehicles that pool funds from sophisticated investors for investment in start-ups, infrastructure, and other high-return avenues, regulated by Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) under AIF regulations, 2012.
- **Eligibility:** Minimum fund corpus of ₹20 crore; Individual investments must exceed ₹1 crore.

- **Significance:** AIFs contribute to economic growth by funding critical sectors like infrastructure and start-ups, and they attract foreign and domestic capital.
- **Types of AIFs in India (as per SEBI):**
 - **Category I:** Invest in start-ups, infrastructure, social ventures.
 - **Category II:** Includes private equity funds and debt funds.
 - **Category III:** Hedge funds and other complex strategies for short-term returns.

	Mutual Funds	Alternative Investment Funds (AIFs)
Investors	Retail investors with low investment size	High Net Worth Individuals and institutional investors with a minimum capital of ₹1 Crore.
Risk	Relatively lower due to diversified portfolios and strict regulatory norms	High risk investments, typically targeting categories with high-returns
Nature of products	Standard products for all Investors	Customised and Niche products
Regulation	Heavily regulated by SEBI under Mutual Funds Regulations, 1996.	Regulated by SEBI (under AIF regulations, 2012) but less stringent than mutual funds.

DEBATE AROUND LEGALISATION OF MINIMUM SUPPORT PRICE

#AGRICULTURE #SUBSIDIES



The **Parliamentary Standing Committee on Agriculture** has recently recommended that the Government should **legalise Minimum Support Price (MSP)** to ensure price

stability and promote investment by farmers. On the other hand, the Supreme Court appointed **Committee of Farm laws** has opined that such a move would **go against the interests of farmers** as well as Indian Agriculture.

DETAILS ABOUT MINIMUM SUPPORT PRICE (MSP)

REGIME

- **Declaration of MSP** by Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) based on the recommendations of the Commission on Agricultural Costs and Prices (CACP).
- **Coverage of Commodities:** 22 commodities, which comprise 7 cereals (paddy, wheat, maize, sorghum, pearl millet, barley and ragi), 5 pulses (gram, tur, moong, urad, lentil), 7 oilseeds (groundnut, rapeseed-mustard, soyabean, sesamum, sunflower, safflower, Niger seed), and 3 commercial crops (copra, cotton and raw jute).

DETERMINANTS OF MSP

- Demand and Supply
- Cost of Production
- Price trends in the market, both domestic and international
- inter-crop price parity
- Terms of Trade (ToT) between agriculture and non-agriculture: ToT refers to the ratio of Prices received by Farmers on agricultural commodities to the Prices paid

by the Farmers to purchase non-agricultural goods and services.

- Likely implications of MSP on consumers of that product.

HOW ARE THE MSPS FIXED?

MSP is fixed at 1.5 times the cost of production.

APPROACHES TO MEASURE THE COST OF PRODUCTION

- **A2 Approach**, which includes the cost of inputs such as seeds, fertilizer, labour.
- **A2+FL Approach**, which includes A2 and the implied cost of family labour (FL).
- **C2 Approach**, which includes the implied rent on land and interest on capital assets and A2+FL.

Note: Presently, India follows A2+FL approach to declare MSP at 1.5 times the cost of production.

DIFFERENCE BETWEEN FRP AND MSP

- Fair and Remunerative Price for Sugarcane is declared under Sugarcane control order 1966 issued under Essential commodities Act, 1955 and hence it enjoys **legal status**. It means that it is **legally binding** for the sugarcane Industries to purchase sugarcane from farmers at FRP, else it would be considered illegal.
- However, **MSP does not enjoy statutory recognition**. This means that **there is no onus on the traders** to buy crops at MSP.

DEBATE ABOUT LEGALISATION OF MSP

Arguments in favour of Legalization of MSP	Arguments against Legalization of MSP
<p>Price assurance in the form of legal guarantee for MSP would reduce volatility in prices and would encourage investment by farmers.</p> <p>Prevents exploitation by Middlemen and Traders as they would be required to pay MSP fixed by the Government.</p> <p>Encourage crop diversification by encouraging farmers to grow Pulses, Millets and Oilseeds.</p> <p>Ensure Food security by encouraging farmers to grow multiple crops.</p> <p>Double Farmers' income by providing farmers with remunerative prices.</p> <p>Multiplier Effect: Increase in Farmers' income would stimulate economic activity in rural areas,</p>	<p>Goes against Interest of Farmers: In the event of bumper harvest, prices of the commodities would fall below MSP. During such times, the private sector may not procure the commodities fearing penalty.</p> <p>Goes against Interest of Agriculture as it would not solve structural problems such as lack of irrigation, higher post-harvest losses, lower R&D investment in seeds & Fertilizers, vulnerability to climate change etc.</p> <p>Adverse Impact on Economy: Higher costs of procurement due to a statutory MSP will increase the food prices, leading to inflation. Higher prices of commodities would also adversely affect exports of agricultural commodities</p> <p>Financing needs: According to some estimates, if the Government were to procure all the 22 crops at MSP, it would amount to half of the Government's Budget.</p>

reduce distress migration to urban areas, boost food processing sector

Unsustainable Food grain Management Policy: The Food subsidy bill has already become quite unsustainable at around Rs 2 lakh crores. Legalization of MSP would further worsen the scenario.

Administrative Challenge: lack of government machinery to procure all crops that are under the MSP system accompanied by increase in judicial burden.

Violation of WTO Agreement on Agriculture (AoA): Legalization of MSP would further violate the limit on the subsidies under AoA and it can be challenged by other countries. India's quest for Permanent solution on Public stockholding could be in jeopardy.

WAY FORWARD

As highlighted by Eco Survey 2019-20, in any free-market economy, Government intervention, sometimes though well intended, often **ends up adversely affecting the market**. Hence, rather than legalising MSP, the Government can focus on the following strategies:

- **Flexibility to the States:** Legalisation of MSP can be prerogative of the States as per their specific agricultural policy priorities. The States can provide for a legal backing for such procurements at their own costs - as the recent Punjab Amendment Act does. Similarly, Kerala has recently announced MSP for fruits and vegetables. Some States also announce bonuses on the MSP announced by the Centre.
- **Reintroduce Farm laws (SC Appointed Committee on Farm Laws)** to liberalise agriculture marketing and give freedom to farmers to sell the commodities wherever and whomever they want.
- **Promote Inverse Fork-to-Farm Strategy (Dalwai Panel):** Encourage farmers to grow crops based upon the prevailing demand as it would fetch them higher prices.
- **Enhancing Bargaining power of Farmers:** Even though the Government does not declare MSP for Milk, Farmers get higher prices as they have been organised into cooperatives. Hence, bargaining power of farmers can be enhanced through:
 - Organising Farmers into FPOs.
 - Strengthening E-NAM
 - Promotion of Contract Farming
 - Promotion of Negotiable Warehousing Receipts (NWRS)
 - Strengthen futures market for efficient price discovery and hedging of risks by farmers (Eco Survey 2023-24)

- **Replace Open-ended Procurement policy** by Closed ended procurement policy to discourage cultivation of Rice and Wheat. (SC appointed Committee on Farm Laws)
- **Bring Agricultural Marketing (Dalwai Panel)** under Concurrent list for greater coordination between Centre and States.

SOVEREIGN GOLD BOND SCHEME

#FINANCIAL INSTRUMENTS

PRIMARY SOURCE The Indian EXPRESS

*The Union government is considering **discontinuing the sovereign gold bond scheme** due to the high cost of financing the scheme. The recent developments like reduction of import duty on gold in the Union budget 2024-25, have raised the questions over the effectiveness of the SGB scheme.*

What are Sovereign Gold Bonds (SGBs)?

- **Definition:** SGBs are government securities (**debt securities**) denominated in grams of gold. They are substitutes for holding physical gold. Investors have to pay the issue price in cash and the bonds will be redeemed in cash on maturity. The Bond is issued by the **RBI** on behalf of the Government of India.
- **Key Features:**
 - **Denomination:** One gram of gold and in multiples thereof.
 - **Minimum investment:** One gram with a maximum limit of 4 kg for individuals, 4 kg for Hindu Undivided Family (HUF) and 20 kg for trusts and similar entities notified by the government.
 - **Interest rate:** 2.50% (fixed rate) per annum on the amount of initial investment.

- **Maturity Period:** 8 years
- **Lock-in Period:** 5 years
- The money raised through SGBs is counted as part of **Fiscal Deficit**.
- SGBs are taxable as per the provisions of the **Income-tax Act, 1961**. The capital gains tax on redemption of SGB to an individual has been exempted.

RATIONALE OF SOVEREIGN GOLD BONDS SCHEME

- To encourage citizens to invest in gold bonds. This would reduce the demand of physical gold and thus reduce gold imports. (Gold imports are a significant contributor to India's trade deficit).
- To shift a part of the domestic savings used for the purchase of physical gold into financial savings.

WHO CAN INVEST IN THE SGBs?

- Persons resident in India as defined under **Foreign Exchange Management Act, 1999**.
- Eligible investors include individuals, HUFs, trusts, universities and charitable institutions.

WHO ARE THE AUTHORISED AGENCIES TO SELL SGBs?

Bonds are sold through offices or branches of:

- Nationalised Banks
- Scheduled Private Banks
- Scheduled Foreign Banks
- Designated Post Offices
- Stock Holding Corporation of India Ltd.
- Authorised stock exchanges

CHALLENGES AND CONCERNS WITH SGBs

- **High Financing Costs:** Cost of financing the fiscal deficit through SGBs is quite high and does not align with the benefits accruing to investors from the scheme.
- **Reduced SGB Value:** Government in Budget 2024-25 has reduced the gold import duty from 15% to 6%. As the price of gold has decreased due to lower import duty, the value of SGBs, which are linked to gold prices, has also declined. This has made SGB less attractive.
- **Reduced Demand of SGB:** Due to diminishing demand for SGB, the government has reduced the number of SGB issuances from 10 tranches per year to just two. In the current fiscal year (2024-25), no issuance of SGB has taken place so far.

- **Limited Tax Base:** Despite the government's efforts to reduce physical gold holdings, there has been limited success in expanding the investor base for gold bonds.

RBI ASKS STATES TO SUSTAIN FISCAL PRUDENCE

#FISCAL POLICY #MOBILISATION OF RESOURCES

PRIMARY SOURCE THE HINDU

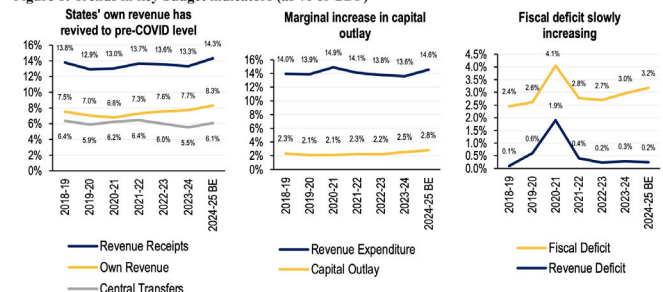
Recently, the RBI has released a report on "**State Finances — A Study of Budgets of 2024-25.**" The report emphasises the need for **sustained fiscal prudence** to states while prioritising growth-enhancing capital spending.

OBSERVATIONS BY RBI

1. Positive Trends:

- **Rising Capital Expenditure:** Capital expenditure increased from 2.4% of GDP (2021-22) to **2.8%** (2023-24) and budgeted at **3.1% of GDP** in 2024-25. This reflects improvement in the quality of expenditure.
- **Deficit Management:** State governments have contained their **gross fiscal deficit** (GFD) within 3% of GDP (gross domestic product) and **Revenue deficit** at 0.2% of GDP during 2022-23 and 2023-24.
- **Declining Debt levels:** States' **total outstanding liabilities** have declined from 31.1% of GDP (March 2021) to **28.5%** at March 2024.
- **Policy Reforms:** State-specific fiscal **responsibility legislations** (FRLs), along with tax and expenditure reforms have strengthened states' finances over the past two decades.

Figure 1: Trends in key budget indicators (as % of GDP)



2. Concerns:

- **Rise in Subsidies burden:** There is a sharp rise in expenditure on subsidies, driven by:

- farm loan waivers
- free/subsidised services (like electricity to agriculture and households, transport, gas cylinder)
- cash transfers to farmers, youth and women.
- **Too many Central government schemes** reduce flexibility of State government spending and dilute the spirit of cooperative fiscal federalism.
- **Persistent high level of subnational debt** calls for a credible roadmap for debt consolidation.
 - Through the states' total outstanding liabilities have declined to 28.5% (March 2024), but they still remain:
 - above the pre-pandemic level (**25.3%** at end-March 2019).
 - above the 20% ceiling by **Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management (FRBM) Act, 2017**.

SUGGESTIONS BY RBI

Overall, the State governments have made progress in fiscal consolidation, there is scope for further improvement.

- **States need to rationalise their subsidy** outgoes so that subsidy spending does not crowd-out capital expenditure.
- **Rationalisation of centrally sponsored schemes** to free up budgetary space to meet State-specific expenditure and reduce fiscal burden of both Union and State governments.
- **Develop a transparent and time-bound** debt consolidation roadmap, aligned with macroeconomic objectives such as debt sustainability, resilience, and fiscal flexibility.
- **Consistent reporting** of contingent liabilities and off-budget borrowings to enhance fiscal transparency and aid in assessing fiscal health of States.
- **Improving public expenditure efficiency** by implementing outcome budgeting, i.e., linking spending to measurable outcomes.
- **Adoption of climate budgeting** to integrate climate action into fiscal planning.
- **Leverage technologies** like artificial intelligence and machine learning to utilise micro-data generated by state departments for improved public policy and better governance.
- **Timely and adequate transfers to local bodies** by States to strengthen decentralised governance. A multi-

pronged approach is required to refine the process of appointment of State Finance Commissions (SFCs), data collection and improving the quality of SFC reports.

NITI AAYOG PROPOSES S.A.F.E. ACCOMMODATIONS

#WELFARE MECHANISMS #INCLUSIVE GROWTH

PRIMARY
SOURCE

pib

NITI Aayog recently released a report "S.A.F.E. Accommodation - Worker Housing for manufacturing growth" suggesting the Central Government to build mega housing projects near manufacturing plants where industrial workers could rent a room for as low as Rs 3000.

INDIA'S MANUFACTURING ASPIRATIONS

- India aims to increase the **manufacturing sector's contribution to GDP** (from the current 17% to 25%) and become a **global manufacturing hub**, as part of its vision for 'Viksit Bharat' by 2047.
- As per the Economic Survey 2023-24, India needs to **add 7.85 million jobs every year** until 2030 to sustain economic growth. A productive workforce is central to attain the vision.
- India needs to **create more jobs for women** and increase Female Labour Force Participation Rate. In India, women contribute **only 18% to the GDP**. (In China, women's contribution to GDP is around 41%)

ISSUES DUE TO INADEQUATE HOUSING NEAR INDUSTRIAL HUBS

- High Attrition rates and Increased workforce instability
- Reduced Labour productivity
- Limits Labour mobility (restricts migration of workers)
- Poor Female Labour Force Participation Rate (FLFP)

WHY S.A.F.E. ACCOMMODATION MATTERS?

- **Enhance Workforce Productivity**
 - Lower commute time
 - Affordable housing for workers
 - Improves workers' quality of life
 - Enables labour mobility
- **Win-Win-Win Scenario:**

- S.A.F.E. accommodation for labour, Increases FLFP rate.
- Lower attrition rate, lower recruitment costs and stable workforce for Companies.
- Promotes planned Urban development.
- Ensures attractive returns on investment for Private developers.
- Promotes competitiveness of the Indian manufacturing sector & attracts global investment.
- Aligns with Global Labour Standards (E.g., ILO Labor Welfare Conventions)

Note:

- **Factories Act, 1948:** Mandates basic welfare amenities for workers which can be extended to housing. (As per the Act: Factories employing more than 150 workers must provide and maintain adequate and suitable shelters/restrooms, and lunchrooms for the use of workers)
- **Social Security Code, 2020:** Consolidates the laws relating to social security benefits including housing to all employees either in the organised, unorganised or any other sectors.

PROPOSED SOLUTIONS BY NITI AAYOG**1. Regulatory Recommendations:**

- **S.A.F.E accommodation should be classified as a distinct category** of residential housing. This classification would ensure:
 - **GST Exemption** for accommodations meeting specified criteria (E.g., ₹20,000 per person per month for a continuous stay of 90 days).
 - **Residential Rates:** Application of residential property tax, electricity, and water tariffs to reduce operating costs.
- **Long-term, dormitory-style affordable accommodations** designed exclusively for industrial workers, located near their workplaces.
- **Zoning Reforms:** Allow 'mixed land use' in industrial zones or designate 'SAFE accommodation as a permitted use in industrial zones' to enable construction of working houses close to workplaces.
- **Environment Clearance Exemption:** Include S.A.F.E. accommodations under the exemptions provided for industrial sheds, schools, colleges, and hostels in the draft notification issued by the Ministry of Environment, Forest, and Climate Change.

2. Financial Recommendations:• **Provision of Viability Gap Funding (VGF):**

- Provide up to 30-40% of the total project cost (excluding land) through VGF, with 20% contributed by the Department of Economic Affairs (DEA) and 10% by the sponsoring nodal ministry (MoHUA). Additionally, State Governments may provide a VGF up to 10%.

- **Retrofitting Existing Facilities:** VGF can also be leveraged to retrofit / upgrade existing brownfield workers' accommodation facilities.

- **Competitive Bidding:** Determine VGF support through a transparent and competitive bidding process.

WHY ARE GREEN DEPOSITS STRUGGLING?

#MOBILISATION OF RESOURCES #GREEN DEPOSITS

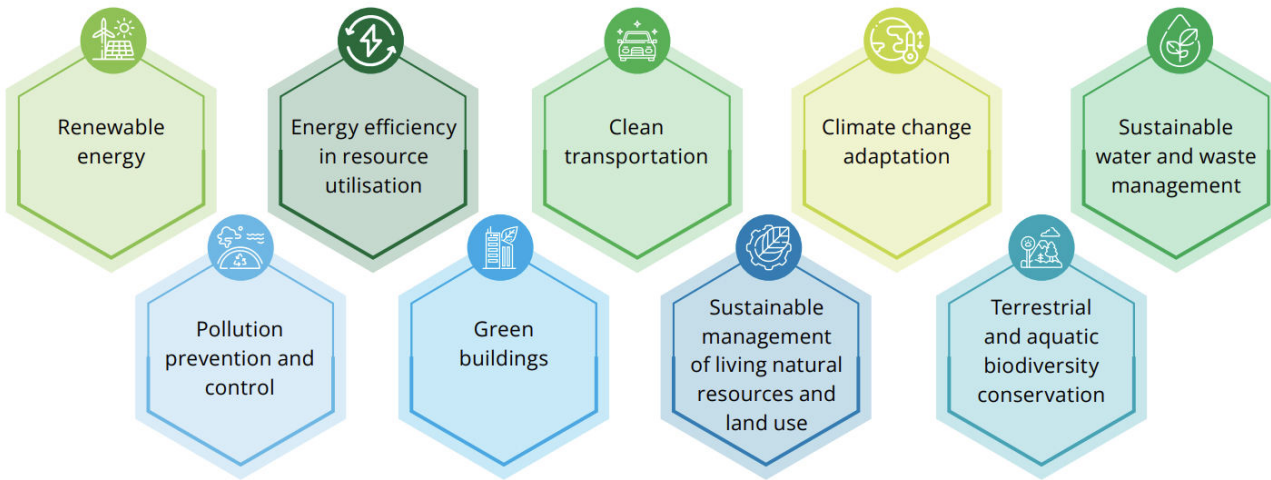
PRIMARY SOURCE THE HINDU BUSINESS LINE

*In April 2023, the RBI had issued a comprehensive framework for lenders to **accept green deposits** to enable the lenders and customers to **further the green cause**. However, over 20 months since its introduction, banks still face **hurdles in pricing and public engagement**.*

WHAT ARE GREEN DEPOSITS?

- A green deposit is a **fixed-term deposit** for investors looking to invest their surplus cash reserves in environmentally friendly projects.
 - Lenders shall issue green deposits as cumulative/non-cumulative deposits.
 - On maturity, the green deposits can be renewed or withdrawn at the option of the depositor.
 - According to RBI norms, these deposits shall be denominated in **Indian Rupees** only.
- **Who can offer green deposits?** All scheduled commercial banks (**excluding** Regional Rural Banks, Local Area Banks, and payment banks) and all **deposit-taking NBFCs** registered with RBI, including Housing Finance Companies.
- **RBI's Regulatory Framework for Green Deposits** lays down clear allocation guidelines for sectors eligible to receive green deposits.

- RBI also mandates an **independent annual third party audit** of allocation of funds raised through green deposits to ensure compliance to green objectives.



Eligible sectors/projects to receive green deposits:

- Renewable energy- solar, wind, biomass, hydropower
- Sustainable Water & Waste management
- Clean transportation
- Energy efficiency
- Afforestation
- Climate change adaptation
- Green buildings
- Coastal and marine environment projects
- Certified organic farming

EXCLUDED PROJECTS

- Projects involving new or existing extraction, production and distribution of fossil fuels; Nuclear power generation; Direct waste incineration; Landfill projects; Hydropower plants larger than 25 MW, etc.

CHALLENGES FACING GREEN DEPOSITS IN INDIA

- **Lower interest rate:** For instance, SBI offers a 7% interest rate for 2-3 year tenor retail domestic term deposit, whereas a green deposit with similar tenor has 6.65% rate of interest.
- **Lack of alignment with green goals:** Customers are neither aware of nor attracted by the philosophy behind or benefits of green deposits.

- **Poor adoption by private banks:** While most public sector banks have started accepting green deposits, private banks have been slow adopters to market green deposits.

CII SUGGESTS CHANGES IN PSL NORMS

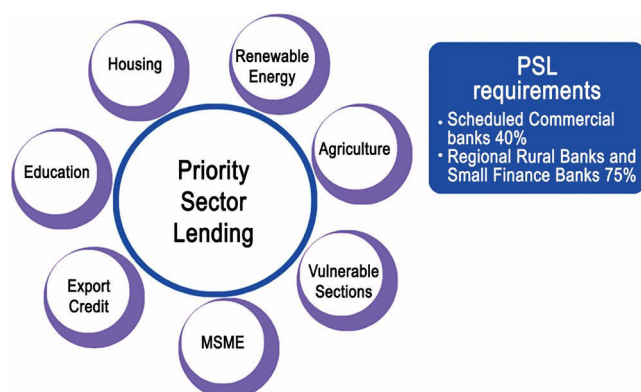
#BANKING AND FINANCE

PRIMARY SOURCE The Indian EXPRESS

Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) has **proposed reforms** in the **Priority-sector lending (PSL) framework** suggesting inclusion of emerging sectors and high-impact sectors like digital infrastructure, green initiatives, healthcare and innovative manufacturing into the PSL framework.

PRIORITY SECTOR LENDING (PSL)

- PSL is a practice of **lending a certain portion of a bank's funds** to specific sectors of the economy identified as priority sectors by regulatory authorities.
- **Aim:** To ensure that **key sectors** crucial to the nation's development receive adequate financial support or credit.
- These sectors include- **Agriculture and allied sectors, MSME, Export credit, Education, Housing, Social Infrastructure, Renewable Energy** etc.



NEEDS TO REFORM PSL FRAMEWORK

- **Change in sectoral dynamics:** Traditional sectors like agriculture have seen a reduction in their GDP contribution to 14% now, while PSL allocations to the sector remain at 18%. So, a recalibration in the PSL framework is needed to reflect current economic reality.
- **Requirements of sunrise sectors:** Sectors like green energy, and digital infrastructure lack funding opportunities, therefore they require inclusion in the PSL for credit flow.
- **Learnings from globe:** Nations like Brazil and Indonesia provide cheap and priority loans to emerging sectors like green initiatives.
- **Fostering promising growth:** Providing PSL to sectors like digital infrastructure can ensure sustainable returns to the banks due to their profitable nature.

ISSUES IN PSL REFORMS

- **Vulnerable sectors:** Various sectors like agriculture and small industries sectors are already less attractive for banks. Changes in the PSL norms will negatively impact funding in these sectors.
- **Exploring alternatives:** Sectors like digital infrastructure are attractive for private investors and venture capitalists due to their scope and productivity. So, alternate funding mechanisms can be explored for them, without tapping into PSL.
- **Possible public resistance:** The change in norms may be perceived as an anti-welfarist approach leading to opposition and backlash.
- **Uncertain potential:** Emerging sectors like green initiatives lack proper research and their economic potential might be overestimated. This may lead to the issues in recovery of loans.

WAY FORWARD

- **Reducing stagnant sector share:** Stagnant and reducing sectors like agriculture need to be rationalised, while alternate mechanisms like private financing can be explored for these sectors.
- **Phased implementation:** PSL norms need to be transformed in a phased manner by analysing the long-term and short-term impacts on the various stakeholders.
- **Pushing for holistic reforms** to enhance funding in emerging sectors. Liberalising the bond market and promoting private financing can be explored in this regard.

TOUGH ROADS TO VIKSIT BHARAT BY 2047

#ECONOMIC GROWTH

PRIMARY SOURCE The Indian EXPRESS

Ex governor of Reserve Bank of India has raised concerns about the achievement of targets of 'Viksit Bharat' by 2047 with the present pace of economic prospects.

ABOUT 'VIKSIT BHARAT 2047'

- Viksit Bharat 2047 is a **vision introduced** by the Government of India aiming to transform the country into a **developed and self-reliant nation by the year 2047**, marking the centenary of India's Independence.
- **Various objectives** of the Viksit Bharat target:
 - Economic growth and self-reliance by pushing '**Make in India**' and **Atma Nirbhar Bharat** scheme.
 - Human resource development by implementing **National Education Policy 2020** with efficiency and promoting skill training with **PM Kaushal Vikas Yojana**.
 - Infrastructure development by fostering growth of physical, social and digital infrastructure under **Smart City** initiative.
 - Sustainable growth by reducing carbon emission by adopting alternative energy sources to achieve **carbon neutrality by 2070**.
 - Promoting good governance with administrative reforms using **Mission Karmyogi** and **e-governance**.

- Fostering inclusive growth by **raising women participation in the economy** and ensuring equitable growth across the regions in the nation.
- **Robust global leadership** by strengthening the position of India in organisations like the UN, G20 and BRICS.

CONSTRAINTS IN ACHIEVING VIKSIT BHARAT BY 2047

- **India is facing high headline inflation**, especially due to food and fuel inflation. This reduces savings of people **reducing the prospects for an investment led growth by channelising the savings**.
- **Low growth rate** of about 6%, **due to the underutilised potential of demographic potential in India**.
- **Populist policies** of state governments leave less scope for the capital investment to foster the growth of India.
- **India has a low tax to GDP ratio** i.e., of **11.7%** as compared to 40% in OECD nations impacting the revenue of the government.
- **Substandard labour**: India has only 5% of formal skilled labour as compared to 95% in South Korea, hampering the growth.
- **India is facing premature deindustrialisation**, where the service sector has taken over the economy without complete actualisation of the manufacturing sector's potential.
- **Non-uniform sectoral growth** leaves certain sectors like agriculture vulnerable. This restrains the growth rate of the nation.

WAY FORWARD TO ACHIEVE VIKSIT BHARAT BY 2047

- **Rationalisation of targets** to make them more practical to achieve by tracing the growth in a phased manner.
- **Focusing job creation**: To materialise the demographic potential of India jobs need to be created by **promoting labour intensive industries like textile**.
- **Promoting capital expenditure**: To achieve the desired infrastructural growth India needs to focus more on the capital expenditure.
- **Human resource development**: India should focus on promoting skills and education, especially higher education in STEM (Science and technology; Engineering and Mathematics).

- **Rationalisation of freebies schemes** to focus more on developmental aspects.
- **India should implement deep sectoral reforms** in the agriculture, mining and manufacturing sectors by fostering private partnership to make them a growth engine of the economy.

A phased, consultative and inclusive strategy will help India to become a 'Viksit Desh' by 2047 in a sustainable manner.

PDS POSING CHALLENGES IN CPI CALCULATION

#INFLATION #CONSUMER PRICE INDEX



Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI) has floated a discussion paper in a process to **revise the base year of Consumer Price Index (CPI)**.

MAJOR HIGHLIGHTS OF THE DISCUSSION PAPER

- **Objective**: To revise the base year of CPI by updating weights and basket of CPI by introducing possible improvements in methodology of CPI compilation.
- **Contention on PDS and free social transfers in context of CPI**: The Ministry highlighted two major challenges in free distribution of PDS (Public Distribution System) items in context of CPI compilations:
 - a. **Mid Series Adjustments**: How to address the reduction in the price of PDS items from positive value to zero or increase in price of PDS items from zero to some positive amount during an ongoing series?
 - b. **Inclusion in CPI basket at start of series**: Should the free PDS items (which involve no out of pocket expenditure) be included in CPI basket or not remains a challenge.

CHALLENGES OF INCLUDING FREE ITEMS IN CPI

- Various states and UT distribute various items like Kerosene in PDS for free of cost, which poses a challenge in calculation of such items as the out of pocket expenditure is zero for such items.
 - **Existing norm**- Such goods are assigned with the value of zero. Therefore, these items are effectively excluded from the CPI basket.

- **IMF recommendation-** International Monetary Fund suggests excluding such items from the index as the index should be restricted to monetary transactions only. Further, such transactions should be ignored as they do not generate any demand for money.
- Thus, **including** free items in CPI could **underestimate inflation**, while their **exclusion** might **fail to reflect** actual consumption patterns of households.

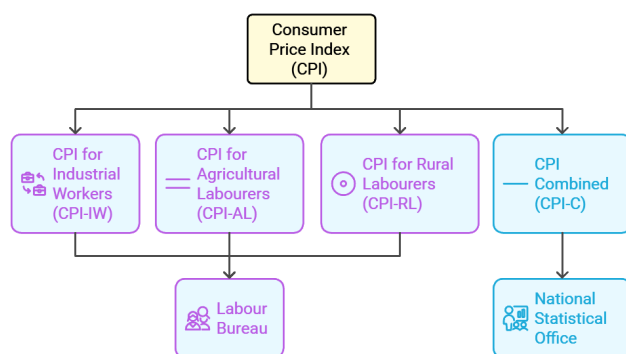
SUGGESTIONS GIVEN IN THE DISCUSSION PAPER

The discussion paper suggests three methods to deal with free PDS items:

1. **Zero value allocation-** This method suggests that zero price to be allocated to items and adjusting the weight during the next update. (*Method is proposed for next series of CPI*)
2. **Redistribution of weight-** Method suggests that the weight of items of such items in PDS to be redistributed as other items within the class or section. (*Method is used in existing series*)
3. **Redistribution across basket-** Third method suggests redistribution of weight broadly over all items of basket.

ABOUT RETAIL INFLATION INDEX IN INDIA

- **Consumer Price Index** or CPI is the market basket index used to calculate the retail inflation in the country.
- RBI uses CPI (Combined) with **base year 2012** to calculate the inflation. CPI (Combined) takes into account price changes in both urban and rural areas.
 - Base year is a reference year to calculate the value of goods.



CPI calculation is a barometer for the inflation in the nation, helping India to calculate its real growth prospects.

To address the challenges in the calculation, the suggestions of the experts and agencies like the International Monetary Fund need to be incorporated.

STRENGTHENING FISHERIES EXTENSION SERVICES

#AGRICULTURE AND ALLIED ACTIVITIES

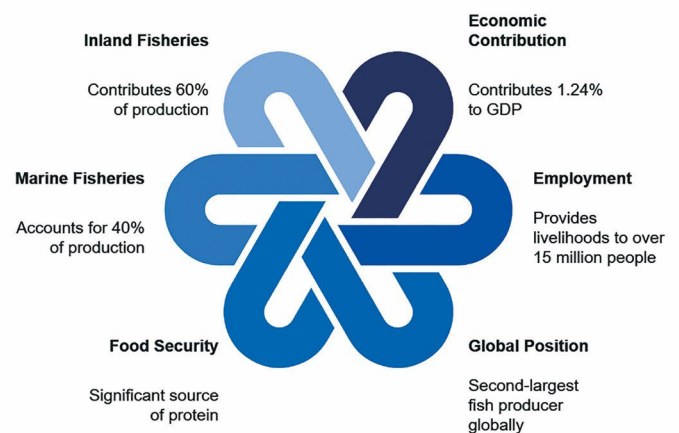
PRIMARY SOURCE | THE HINDU

India has witnessed 83% increase in fish production, making India the **second largest producer of fishes**. Such a rise makes strengthening the fisheries extension services crucial.

ABOUT FISHERIES EXTENSION SECTOR

- Fisheries extension services are specialised programs and activities aimed at improving the knowledge, skills and practices of fishers and aquaculture stakeholders.
- These includes:
 - Disseminating information
 - Promoting sustainable practices
 - Facilitating access to modern technologies.

India's Fisheries Sector Breakdown



GOVERNMENT SCHEMES TO ENHANCE EXTENSION SERVICES

- **Matasya Sampada Kendra:**
 - The scheme provides a one-stop solution to the fishers by providing trained professionals sharing their expertise to boost production.
 - Government assistance up to 60% is provided to set up such centers for women and weaker sections.

- **Notable examples:**
 - Kendra at Tissue Kerala provides a well-equipped lab for water, soil and microbial analysis.
 - Kendra at Nashik focuses on capacity building of Fishers and Fish Farmers on various seed/feed inputs.
- **Sagar Mitra:**
 - Sagar mitras in coastal areas are a vital interface between government and sea-borne fishers.
 - They compile information and data on daily marine catch, price fluctuations, requisite market needs at fish landings harbours.
 - They disseminate information on local regulations, weather forecast, natural calamities, hygienic fish handling and potential fishing zones in the sea.

LACUNA IN FISHERIES EXTENSION SERVICES IN INDIA

- **Limited Reach:** Insufficient number of Sagar Mitras and training centers leaves a large section of fishers unaddressed and vulnerable.
- **Shortage of Infrastructure:** There is an acute shortage of refer vans and cold storage to enhance the shelf life of the fishes.
- **Sustainability Issue:** There are issues like overfishing and habitat degradation. Also, practices like electrocution are criticised during fish export.
- **Quality Issue:** Export quality fish production remains a challenge due to pollutants in fishes. **E.g.,** Tamil Nadu fishes were banned by the EU due to the high amount of pollutants in them.

WAYS TO IMPROVE EXTENSION SERVICES

- **Institutional Integration:** A convergence is needed between the Matsya Kendras and 700 Indian Council of Agricultural Research centers to promote the sharing of machineries.
- **Promoting Digital Outreach:** The National Fisheries Development Board has initiated a nationwide virtual learning platform i.e., 'AquaBazaar'.
- **Learning from Global Best Practices:**
 - **Norway:** Sustainable fishing technology like satellite mapping and digital monitoring. Also, fishing monitoring ensures sustainable yields and boosts exports. (Norway exports 95% of its seafood.)

- **Japan Model:** Japan's co-management model involving Fisheries Cooperative Associations to educate fishers about sustainable practices.

- **Promoting Climate Adaptation:** As climate change is impacting the fishing grounds and yield of fishing. **E.g.,** FAO's Blue Growth Initiative is focusing on climate resilient fishing.
- **Value Addition:** Along with the market access, there is a dire need of value addition of the fish production. **E.g.,** Vietnam's focus on value-added shrimp products has enhanced its global competitiveness.

Strengthening fisheries extension services can drive India towards sustainable fishing and can improve productivity, sustainability, and livelihood of millions dependent on this sector.

REDUCTION IN DOMESTIC MIGRATION

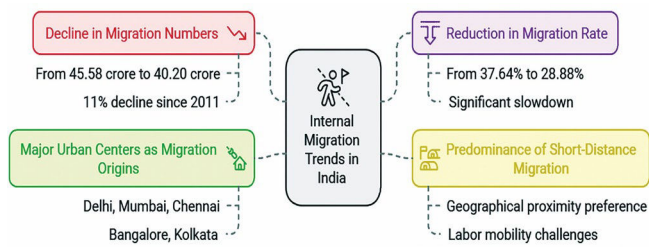
#MIGRATION #LABOUR

PRIMARY SOURCE *The Indian EXPRESS*

As per the Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister (EAC-PM) Report, "400 Million Dreams" the **domestic migration has reduced by 11.78%** as compared to 2011 census.

MAJOR HIGHLIGHTS

- The EAC-PM has highlighted the **reduction in migration rate** from 37.64% in 2011 to 28.88% in 2023. In 2023, the estimated number of migrants is about **40.20 crore** as compared to 45.57 crore in census 2011.
- Three datasets were used to estimate the data:
 - Indian Railway Unreserved Ticketing System data on passenger volume.
 - Mobile telephone roaming data from TRAI
 - District level banking data on remittances
- **Cities attracting the most migrants:** Mumbai, Bengaluru, Kolkata, Delhi and Hyderabad.
- West Bengal, Rajasthan and Karnataka have shown **maximum growth** in migrant arrivals.
- **Hypothesis for trend:** Report suggests improvement in health, education and economic opportunities in small cities as the reason for reduction in the migration rate.



OTHER POSSIBLE REASONS FOR REDUCTION IN MIGRATION

- **Reduced urban center attraction:** The urban centers are suffering from decaying infrastructure, high inflation and poor housing conditions. This can reduce the migration towards the urban centers.
- **Preference to short distance migration:** Migrants from semi-urban centers can prefer short distance migration to seek better economic opportunities.
- **Policy factor:** Government policies like Aspirational District Programme has promoted the jobs and quality of life in tier-2 and tier-3 cities, reducing migration
- **Emerging labour opportunities:** Percolation of development to the semi-urban areas especially the infrastructure projects creates a labour market in the small towns.

ABOUT EAC-PM

Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister is an independent, non-constitutional and non-permanent body formed to **provide objective advice on economic policy matters to the Prime Minister.**

HOUSEHOLD CONSUMPTION EXPENDITURE SURVEY: 2023-24

#CONSUMPTION EXPENDITURE #INFLATION

PRIMARY
SOURCE THE HINDU

Ministry of Statistics & Programme Implementation (**MoSPI**) has recently released the **Household Consumption Expenditure Survey: 2023-24**, based on the data collected during August 2023 to July 2024 from the entire country.

HOUSEHOLD CONSUMPTION EXPENDITURE SURVEY (HCES)

- HCES is designed to **collect information** on **consumption** and **expenditure** of the **households** on **goods and services**.
- **Conducted by:** National Sample Survey Office (NSSO), under the Ministry of Statistics & Programme Implementation.
- **Utility of the Survey:** It provides data required to:
 - Assess trends in economic well-being (measure poverty, inequality, and social exclusion).
 - Determine and update the basket of consumer goods and services and weights used for the calculation of the **Consumer Price Index (CPI)**.
- **Monthly Per Capita Consumption Expenditure (MPCE)** compiled from HCES is the primary indicator used for most analytical purposes.
- **Sample size:** The estimates of MPCE of 2023-24 are based on the data collected from over 2.61 lakh households (both urban and rural) spread over all States and Union Territories in the country.

Table 1: Average MPCE (Rs.) at current Prices and 2011-12 prices

Survey	Period	at current Prices		at 2011-12 Prices	
		Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban
HCES: 2023-24	Aug 2023- Jul 2024	4,122	6,996	2,079	3,632
HCES: 2022-23	Aug 2022- Jul 2023	3,773	6,459	2,008	3,510
68 th round (2011-12)	Jul 2011-Jun 2012	1,430	2,630	1,430	2,630

Table 2: Average MPCE with imputation (Rs.) at current Prices and 2011-12 prices

Survey	Period	at current Prices		at 2011-12 Prices	
		Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban
HCES: 2023-24	Aug 2023- Jul 2024	4,247	7,078	2,142	3,674
HCES: 2022-23	Aug 2022- Jul 2023	3,860	6,521	2,054	3,544
68 th round (2011-12)	Jul 2011-Jun 2012	1,430	2,630	1,430	2,630

IMPORTANT FINDINGS OF HCES: 2023-24

- **Average MPCE** in rural and urban India in 2023-24 has been estimated to be Rs. 4,122 and Rs. 6,996, respectively, **without taking into account** the values of items received free of cost by the households through various social welfare programmes.
 - In nominal prices, the average MPCE (without imputation) in 2023-24 **increases by about 9%** in rural areas and 8% in urban areas from the level of 2022-23.
- **Average MPCE with imputed values** of items received free of cost through various social welfare programmes is estimated to be Rs. 4,247 and Rs. 7,078 respectively, for rural and urban areas.
- **Urban-rural gap in MPCE** has declined to 71% in 2022-23 from 84% in 2011-12. It has further come down to

70% in 2023-24 that confirms **sustained momentum of consumption growth** in rural areas.

- **Consumption Inequality** (measured in terms of the Gini Coefficient), both in rural and urban areas, has declined in 2023-24 from the level of 2022-23.
 - **Gini coefficient** has declined to **0.237** from 0.266 in 2022-23 for rural areas and to **0.284** from 0.314 in 2022-23 for urban areas.
- **Non-food items** (Rent, conveyance, clothing, bedding, footwear, entertainment) accounted for about 53% of household's average MPCE in rural areas, up from about 47% in 2011-12, and 60% in urban areas, up from about 57%.

ANALYSIS OF THE TRENDS

- **India's average household consumption spending rose** about 3.5% in real terms through August 2023 to July 2024. This signals a decline in consumption inequality as well as a narrowing gap between urban and rural spending.
- **Decline in gini coefficient** reflects reduction in consumption inequality across both urban and rural sectors. Social welfare schemes like PM-KISAN, PM Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana have contributed to narrowing consumption inequality.
- **Free items from the social welfare programs** contributed significantly to the total expenditure, enhancing rural and urban MPCE.
- **Dominance of non-food items** to the household's average monthly expenditure highlights India's ongoing transition towards a consumption-led economy. For rural areas, it means a rise in living standard and access to services. For urban areas, it may indicate lifestyle inflation.

INDIA'S FINANCIAL SYSTEM SHOWING STABILITY & RESILIENCE: RBI

#BANKING

PRIMARY
SOURCE THE HINDU

RBI's **Financial Stability Report** released in December 2024, highlights significant improvements in the **asset quality** of Scheduled Commercial Banks (SCB), with Gross NPA ratios at a 12-year low. It shows the **resilience of India's financial**

system, supported by strong capital buffers, improved **provisioning** and healthy domestic financial fundamentals amidst global uncertainties.

RBI'S FINANCIAL STABILITY REPORT

- Published **bi-annually** by the Reserve Bank of India.
- It reflects the collective assessment of the Sub-Committee of **Financial Stability and Development Council (FSDC)**, which is **headed by the RBI Governor**.
- The report **evaluates the resilience** of the Indian financial system and identifies risks to financial stability.

IMPORTANT BANKING-RELATED TERMS

1. Provisioning Coverage Ratio (PCR):

- PCR provides insights into the **adequacy of provisions** made by banks to cover potential losses on their loan portfolios.
- It is calculated by dividing the total provisions held by a bank by its total non-performing loans (NPLs).
- It represents the percentage of NPLs that are covered by provisions.
- A **higher ratio** indicates a **stronger ability** to absorb potential losses.

2. Capital Adequacy Ratio (CAR):

- CAR is the ratio of a bank's capital in relation to its **risk weighted assets** and current liabilities. This is a measure of a bank's ability to meet its obligations.
- A **high CAR** means the bank can absorb losses without diluting capital.

3. CASA Ratio (Current Account Savings Account ratio):

- CASA is the proportion of current account and savings account deposits in the total deposits of the bank.
- A **low CASA ratio** means the bank relies heavily on costlier wholesale funding, which can hurt its margins.

4. Net Interest Margin (NIM):

- This is the difference between interest earned by a bank on loans and the interest it pays on deposits.
- **NIM will be high** for banks with higher low-cost deposits or high lending rates.
- **Low NIM** and **high NPA** is a bad combination.

5. Return on Assets (RoA):

- It shows how profitable a bank's assets are in generating revenue.
- A **lower RoA** means that the bank is not able to utilise assets efficiently.

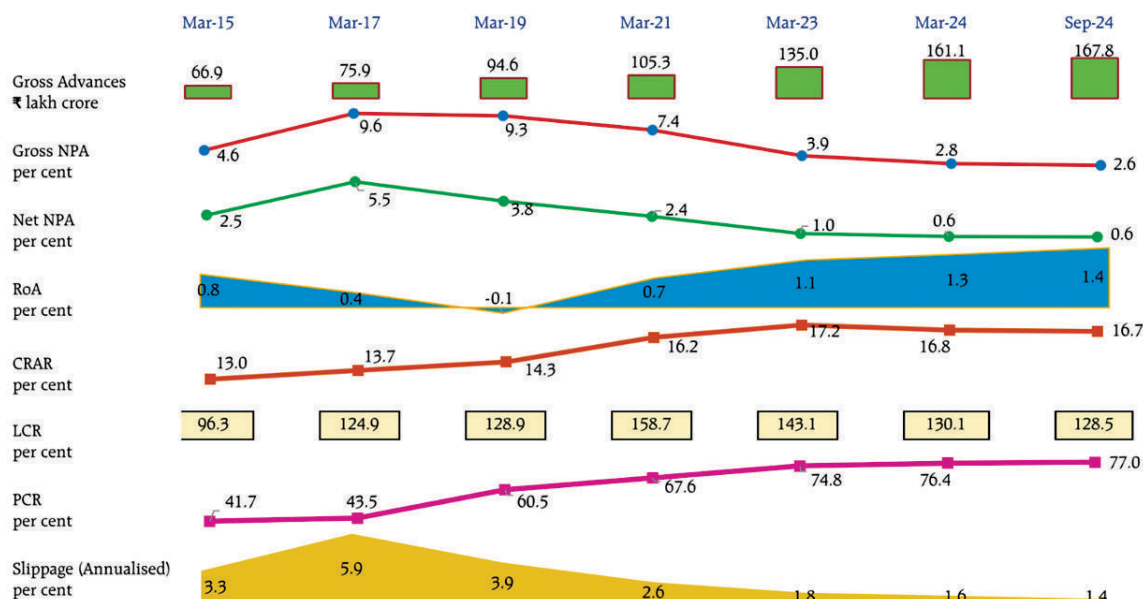
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

- **Negative RoA** implies the bank's assets are yielding negative returns.

6. Capital Conservation Buffer (CCB):

- CCB is a concept introduced under the international **Basel III norms**.
- According to Basel III norms, during good times, banks must build up a capital buffer that can be drawn from, when there is stress.

- In India, to adhere to Basel norms, RBI wants all the commercial banks to achieve a minimum **total capital of 9 per cent** and a **capital conservation buffer of 2.5 per cent**, with the **minimum total capital and CCB** adding up to **11.5 per cent**.



Banking Sector Soundness Indicators

Notes: (1) Data as on December 12, 2024.
(2) Data pertains to domestic operations of SCBs (excluding SFBs).
Sources: RBI supervisory returns and staff calculations.

MAJOR HIGHLIGHTS OF RBI'S FINANCIAL STABILITY REPORT

- **Gross NPA ratio** has declined to a 12-year low of 2.6% in September 2024.
- Scheduled Commercial Bank's **Net NPA ratio** stayed at 0.6%.
- **Provisioning Coverage Ratio** improved to 77% in September, mainly due to proactive provisioning by Public Sector Banks.
- Improvement in **Return on Assets** and earnings before provisions and taxes.
- Sequential decline in the **net interest margin** abetted by **shift of deposits to higher interest rate buckets**.
- Decline in share of low-cost **Current Account Savings Account (CASA) deposits**.
- Increase in share of **term deposits**, especially for higher interest-rate buckets.

SVAMITVA SCHEME: TEN STATES YET TO JOIN

#GOVERNMENT SCHEMES

PRIMARY SOURCE THE HINDU BUSINESS LINE

The **SVAMITVA** scheme, which aims to issue **legal property cards** to rural families, finds hindrance in its implementation as ten states are yet to join the scheme, citing existing systems and other reasons.

ABOUT SVAMITVA SCHEME

- **SVAMITVA** stands for Survey of Villages and Mapping with Improved Technology in Village Areas.
- The **central sector scheme** was launched on the occasion of **National Panchayati Raj Day** on 24th April 2021.
- **Initiative of:** Ministry of Panchayati Raj.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

- The scheme is a collaborative effort of the Ministry of Panchayati Raj, State Panchayati Raj Departments, State Revenue Departments.
- **Survey of India** is the Technology Implementation Agency.
- **Key Features:**
 - It is a reformative step towards **establishment of clear ownership of property** in rural inhabited (**Abadi**) areas.
 - It provides the '**record of rights**' to village household owners possessing houses in **inhabited rural areas in villages**.
 - The **legal ownership cards** (Property cards/Title deeds) would be issued to the property owners by mapping land parcels using **Drone survey** and **CORS** (Continuously Operating Reference Stations) Networks which provides mapping accuracy of 5 cm.
 - It will **cover around 6.62 Lakh villages** of the entire country during 2021-2025.
- **Eligibility:** The applicant should have a property in rural inhabited (Abadi) area.
- **Exclusions:** Agricultural Lands are not covered under this scheme.

 **Assuring clear ownership** of property in rural areas

 **'Record of Rights'** to household owners with issuance of legal ownership cards

 **All villages to be covered** by March 2025

 **Using drone technology** to map land and borders

Gamechanger for India's Rural Development

 **Property card** helping in getting bank loans

 **Reduces land disputes** at local level

 **Efficiency in rural planning** by creation of accurate land records

 **streamlining property tax collections**

BENEFITS OF SVAMITVA SCHEME

- **Reduce property-related disputes** and legal cases by creating accurate land records.
- **Financial stability** to the citizens in rural India by enabling them to use their property as a financial asset for taking loans and other financial benefits.
- Creation of **survey infrastructure and GIS** (Geographic Information System) **maps** that can be leveraged by any department for their use.
- Preparation of a **better-quality Gram Panchayat Development Plan** aided by proper land records and use of GIS maps **enhances governance**.
- **Financial federalism:** Determination of **property tax**, which would accrue to the Gram Panchayats directly in States where it is devolved or else, add to the State exchequer.

PRACTICE QUESTIONS

MCQS

Q1. With reference to Farmer ID, consider the following statements:

1. It is an Aadhaar-linked unique digital identity created and maintained by the Union Government.
2. The government aims to create digital identities for 11 crore farmers by the financial year 2026-27.

Which of the following statements is/are correct?

- (a) 1 only (b) 2 only
(c) Both 1 and 2 (d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q2. With reference to House Price Index (HPI), consider the following statements:

1. The index measures the prices relevant to all houses in the economy.
2. The index uses the data on transacted houses collected from the registration departments of respective state governments.
3. It is a yearly index compiled by the Reserve Bank of India.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 and 2 only (b) 2 only
(c) 1 and 3 only (d) 2 and 3 only

Q3. Which of the following statements is/are correct regarding the difference between Mutual Funds and Alternative Investment Funds?

1. Mutual funds are regulated by SEBI whereas Alternative Investment Funds are unregulated investment vehicles.
2. Minimum investment requirement in mutual funds is relatively lower than in Alternative investment funds.

Select the correct answer using the code given below:

- (a) 1 only (b) 2 only
(c) Both 1 and 2 (d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q4. With reference to the Bima Sakhi Yojana, consider the following statements:

1. It is an initiative of Niti Aayog.
2. Women aged between 21 and 55 years will be eligible for this scheme.

3. Under the scheme, women will receive specialised training along with a stipend for the first three years.

How many of the statements given above are correct?

- (a) Only one (b) Only two
(c) All three (d) None

Q5. How many of the following statements about recently issued Sovereign Green Bonds is/are correct?

1. Sovereign green bonds are fixed interest-bearing financial instruments
2. Only domestic investments are allowed to invest in these Bonds
3. These bonds are issued at a premium and hence yields are higher
4. Tax benefits are provided for investment in sovereign green bonds

Select the correct answer using the code given below:

- (a) 1 only (b) 1 and 2 only
(c) 1 and 3 only (d) 2 and 4 only

DESCRIPTIVE QUESTIONS

- Q1.** In the context of emerging challenges in the agricultural sector, discuss the need for a new Seeds Act and Policy in India. Highlight the key changes required to make the seed sector globally competitive and farmer-centric.
- Q2.** Analyse the changing trends of internal migration in India. Discuss the factors contributing to the decline in the migration rates and its socio-economic implications.

Answers: 1-b, 2-b, 3-b, 4-a, 5-a

CONSTITUTION, POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

GS PAPER (PRELIMS) & GS PAPER II (MAIN)

RESERVATION MUST NOT BE BASED ON RELIGION: SC

#RESERVATION

PRIMARY SOURCE THE HINDU

The Supreme Court of India has recently emphasised that reservations must not be granted solely on religion.

Background: Earlier, the Calcutta High Court had concluded that religion was the “sole criterion for declaring certain castes among the Muslim community as OBC”. The judgment arose a debate around the issue and prompted a review on how reservations are determined.

PRESENT CONSTITUTIONAL AND LEGAL FRAMEWORK

- **Article 15(4):** Enables the State to make special provisions for the advancement of any socially and educationally backward classes or for the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes.
- **Article 16(4):** Provides that the State can enact legislation for the reservation of posts in the government sector or jobs in favour of the backward classes of citizens, which the State considers to have not been adequately represented in the services of the State.
- **Indira Sawhney Judgment:** The Supreme Court in *Indira Sawhney v. The Union of India* upheld the constitutionality of reservations for Other Backward Classes (OBCs) in public employment, capping the reservation at 50%. The court emphasised that identification of backwardness should be based on social and educational criteria rather than religion.

PREVIOUS RULINGS IN THIS CONTEXT

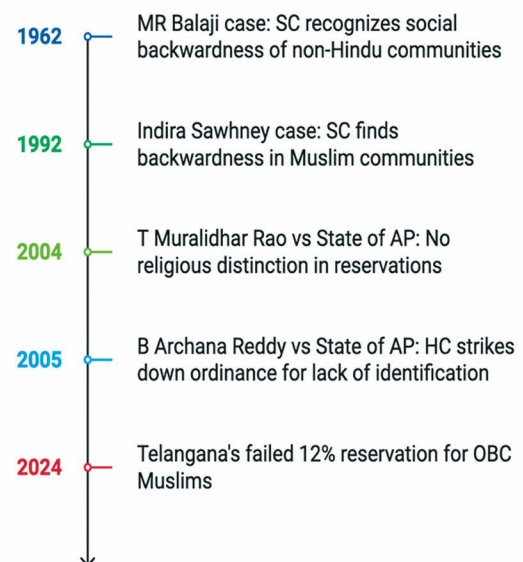
- **MR Balaji case (1962):** The SC held that Muslims/Christians/Sikhs are not excluded for the

purpose of conferring reservations under Article 15(4) or 16(4).

- The court further held that it is **not unlikely** that these communities can be socially backward, so even though caste is considered to be the relevant criteria for determining backwardness in Hindu community, it cannot be made the sole criteria.

- **Indira Sawhney case:** The SC held that in certain states, Muslim communities as a whole can be identified as backwards (based on their social and educational conditions). (E.g., Karnataka, Kerala)
- **T Muralidhar Rao vs State of AP, 2004:** The State while discharging its constitutional obligation cannot make any distinction between one group of citizens and others on the ground of religion, faith or belief.

Evolution of Reservation Policies for Muslim Communities in India



- **B Archana Reddy vs State of AP (2005):** HC struck down the ordinance for extending the benefits of

CONSTITUTION, POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

reservation on the ground that the benefit could not be extended to the **whole community without proper identification** of social backwardness of Muslims by the Commission.

- **Telangana** tried to pass 12% reservation for OBC Muslims based on **G Sudhir Commission report**. However, this was struck down, since it breached the 50% limit set by Indra Sawhney judgement (1992) and the Central Government denied its inclusion in the Ninth schedule.

VARIOUS COMMITTEES RECOMMENDATIONS IN THIS CONTEXT

- **Justice Rajinder Sachar Committee, 2006:** The Muslim community was **almost as backward as** SCs and STs and **more backward than** non-Muslim OBCs.
- **Justice Ranganath Misra Committee, 2007:** It suggested a **15% reservation** for minorities, with **10% specifically for Muslims**.
- **Executive Order, 2012:** The GOI issued an order providing a **4.5% reservation** for minorities within the existing **27% OBC quota**.

The Supreme Court's stand reinforces that social and educational backwardness must be the basis for reservations, not religious identity.

PARDONING POWER OF PRESIDENT IN THE US AND IN INDIA

#INDIAN CONSTITUTION

PRIMARY
SOURCE THE HINDU

Recently, the U.S. President Joe Biden has granted an **"A Full and Unconditional Pardon"**

to his son who was awaiting sentences in two cases related to tax evasion and gun convictions. The President is now considering a series of **'pre-emptive' pardons** for allies, including the Vice-President, former Chief Medical Officer to shield them from arrest and prosecution.

THE US PRESIDENT'S POWER TO PARDON

- In the U.S. Constitution, under **Article II Section 2(1)**, the President can grant pardon except in cases of impeachment.

- The U.S. President has **absolute power of pardon for federal criminal offences**. Such a pardon may be issued **prior to the start of a legal case as well as prior to or after a conviction** for a crime.
- The **Office of the Pardon Attorney** under the **Department of Justice (DoJ)** assists the President by processing thousands of petitions for pardons received annually.
 - The process involves an initial review and an FBI background check before the **recommendation is made to the President**.
 - **The recommendation** is non-binding on the President who makes the final decision.

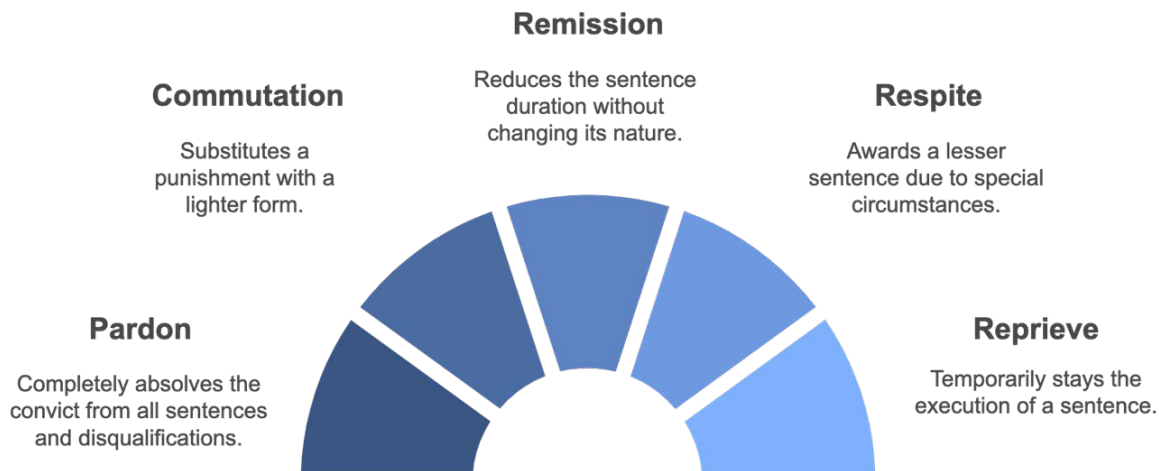
LIMITS OF THE US PRESIDENT'S POWER TO PARDON

- Under Article 2 of the US Constitution:
 - The President can **only pardon** "Offences against the United States", which refers to **criminal offences under federal law** (applicable in multiple states and investigated by federal agencies such as the FBI).
 - The **President cannot pardon** an action that is an offence under the law of a specific state.
 - The President **cannot grant pardons in cases of impeachment**.
- **Implied limitation under Article 2:** A crime must first be committed for a President to then pardon it. However, once a federal crime is committed, the power to pardon could be exercised at any stage including before charges have been filed, during their pendency, or after conviction and judgment.

INDIAN PRESIDENT'S POWER TO PARDON

- President of India under **Article 72 of the Constitution** is empowered to grant pardons, reprieves, respites or remissions of punishment or to suspend, remit or commute the sentence of any person convicted of any offence:
 - in all cases where the punishment or sentence is by a Court Martial
 - in all cases where the punishment or sentence is for an offence against any law relating to a matter to which the executive power of the Union extends.
 - in all cases where the sentence is a sentence of death.

Presidential Pardoning Powers Under Article 72



MARU RAM V. UNION OF INDIA (1980)

- The **Supreme Court** has weighed in on the President's power to grant pardons.
 - Supreme Court held that the pardoning power of the President (under Article 72) and the pardoning power of the Governors (under Article 161) are not subject to **judicial review in its entirety**.
 - However, they have to exercise their powers on the **advice of the Central Council of Ministers (CoM)** and the State Council of Ministers (CoM) respectively, and not as per their discretion.
 - The court would only hear a challenge to the exercise of power under Article 72 in the **'rare' situation** where the decision is wholly irrelevant, irrational, discriminatory or mala fide.

KEY DIFFERENCES BETWEEN PARDONING POWERS OF THE INDIAN PRESIDENT AND THE US PRESIDENT

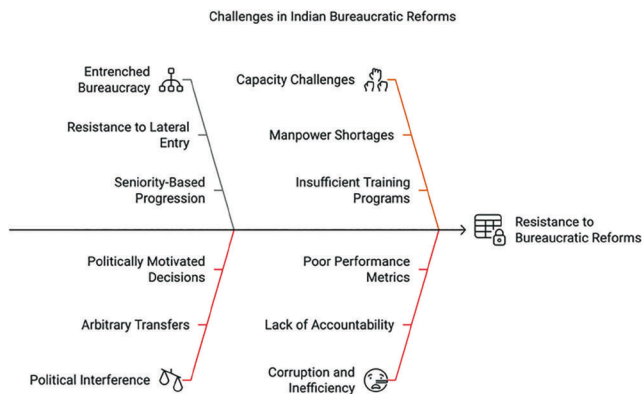
S. No.	Aspects	Pardoning Powers of the US President	Pardoning Powers of the Indian President
1.	Authority	Absolute power to pardon federal crimes.	Acts on the advice of the Council of Ministers.
2.	Jurisdiction	Only pardon crimes committed under Federal law; excludes impeachment and state crime.	Wide-jurisdiction: For any offence against any Union laws, Military laws (Court-Martial) and death sentences.
3.	Pre-emptive Pardon	The U.S. President can issue pardons for past crimes that have not been prosecuted.	Limited to post-conviction or specific cases like death penalties.
4.	Judicial Review	No Judicial Review of the President's decision	Limited review by the Supreme Court for irrational, discriminatory or mala fide actions.

CIVIL SERVICES REFORMS: INDIA'S STEEL FRAME NEEDS A CHECK

#CIVIL SERVICES REFORMS

PRIMARY SOURCE THE HINDU

Persistent challenges within the Indian Administrative Service (IAS) and the wider bureaucracy have highlighted the urgent need for administrative reforms.



ISSUES FACING CIVIL SERVICES/ SERVANTS

- **Resistance to Change:** IAS is deeply embedded in governance, this causes making reforms challenging due to resistance from within the service. **E.g.,** Bureaucratic opposition against lateral entry, performance-based promotions.
- **Centralised decision-making:** Executive-led governance in India, characterised by centralised decision-making, has yielded mixed results. While it has facilitated rapid economic reforms and infrastructure development, it has also led to bottlenecks in policy **implementation** and accountability.
- **Political Interference:** Arbitrary transfers, politically motivated decisions and political pressures complicate reform efforts, undermining bureaucratic neutrality and accountability. Initiatives like the **Civil Services Standards, Performance, and Accountability Bill (2010)** have stalled due to lack of political will and consensus.
- **Capacity Challenges:** Insufficient infrastructure, training programs, and manpower shortages hinder effective implementation of reforms.

- **Lack of Accountability:** Bureaucracy often operates without clear performance metrics, leading to a culture of impunity where poor performance or corruption can go unpunished.
- **Lack of Skill development:** Many civil servants lack modern skills required for effective governance in a digital economy, impacting the implementation of initiatives like e-governance, data led governance.
- **Coordination issues:** Hierarchical structure & bureaucratic silos lead to poor inter-departmental coordination and procedural delays in implementing reforms.
- **Poor Civic Engagement:** The current administrative framework often lacks interaction with citizens, making reforms **less responsive to public needs.**

WAY FORWARD

- **Merit and expertise-based recruitment:** Prioritising domain knowledge and skills over generalist qualifications during recruitment.
- **Robust data systems** to track bureaucratic performance effectively and **performance-based promotions.**
- **Safeguards against arbitrary transfers** to ensure bureaucratic stability as recommended by the Supreme Court in *TSR Subramanian vs. Union of India*.
- **Encouraging Specialisation:** Assigning bureaucrats to policymaking roles based on expertise.
- **Using technology and e-governance** initiatives to foster coordination among departments.
- **Comprehensive Administrative Reforms:** A unified strategy to balance governance efficiency with accountability, aligning reforms with India's economic and developmental goals. (360-degree evaluation).

PRIOR SANCTIONS REQUIRED TO PROSECUTE PUBLIC SERVANTS UNDER PMLA

#GOVERNANCE

PRIMARY SOURCE The Indian EXPRESS

In a recent case, the Supreme Court has held that Section 197(1) of the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC) will also be

CONSTITUTION, POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

applicable to the proceedings in **Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) 2002**.

SECTION 197(1) OF CrPC

- Under Section 197(1) of the CrPC, public servants, judges, or magistrates **can not be prosecuted** for the acts done in their **official capacity (official duties)** without prior approval from the **relevant government authority**.
- The sanction must come from the **Central Government** for Central Government officials and from the **State Government** for those in State.
- It intends to prevent **malicious prosecutions** and protect **decision-making in good faith**.
- BNSS, 2023:** A similar provision exists under **Section 218 of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, 2023**.

INTENTIONS OF THE PROVISION

- Objective:** The provision is meant to **shield public servants** from unnecessary prosecution.
- Exception:** No sanction are required when public servants are accused of certain crimes against women (such as **rape, sexual harassment, stalking, and voyeurism**), and other serious crimes such as **human trafficking**.

IMPACT ON PUBLIC SERVANTS:

- It will add **procedural safeguards** under the stringent provisions of PMLA involving civil servants. The accused public servant, even after being convicted, can appeal and potentially have the conviction set aside, if they can demonstrate:
 - The Act was part of their **official duty**.
 - The trial took place without the **legally mandated government sanction**.

As a result, the accused can argue that the **trial itself was invalid**. If the court agrees, any conviction resulting **from such a trial could be overturned**.

OTHER CONSTITUTIONAL PROTECTION FOR CIVIL SERVANTS

- Part XIV of the Constitution:** Services under the Union and the States.
- Article 309:** Parliament and State legislatures to regulate the recruitment and conditions of service for civil servants.
- Doctrine of Pleasure:** As per Article 310, civil servants hold office at the pleasure of the President or Governor.

- Article 311:** It lays down **two major safeguards** for civil servants.
 - Dismissal or removal can only be done by the appointing **authority or a higher rank**.
 - Dismissal or reduction in rank requires an inquiry with a **reasonable opportunity to defend**.

ONE CANDIDATE MULTIPLE CONSTITUENCY

#ELECTORAL REFORMS

PRIMARY
SOURCE THE HINDU

After the recommendations of **Ram Nath Kovind Panel for Simultaneous Elections**, there is a debate around various other aspects of electoral reforms. One of the issues is **candidates contesting from multiple constituencies** popularly called as **One Candidate Multiple Constituency**.

BACKGROUND

- Indian Constitution provides for regular **elections every five years** to the legislative assembly and the lower house of Parliament.
- The Constitution, other than providing for the **Election Commission of India (ECI)**, has **empowered Parliament** to regulate the manner of **conducting the elections**.
- The **Representation of the People Act 1951** deals with the issue of **'contesting from multiple constituencies'**.
 - Until 1996, there was no limit on the number of constituencies a candidate could contest. This resulted in candidates contesting from multiple constituencies. This necessitated by-elections frequently.

ADVANTAGES OF CONTESTING FROM MULTIPLE CONSTITUENCIES (OCMC)

- Safety net for candidates:** Contesting from multiple constituencies allows candidates to secure at least one win in tightly contested areas.
- Leadership continuity:** OCMC can ensure the continuity of leadership within a party in case important leaders lose elections. This helps maintain party stability and leadership presence.
- Strategic vote division:** Contesting from multiple constituencies can **strategically divide the**

CONSTITUTION, POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

opposition's votes, increasing the chances of winning in each constituency. This tactic can strengthen a party's overall electoral performance.

- **Demonstrating popularity and influence:** By contesting from multiple seats, a candidate can showcase their **popularity across different regions**, enhancing their image as a leader with wide support.

CHALLENGES INVOLVED

- **Financial burden on taxpayers:** The administrative costs for Lok Sabha elections are borne by the central government, while state elections are funded by state governments. The estimated cost for **the 2024 general election is ₹6,931 crore**.
 - If a candidate wins from two constituencies, the additional cost for holding a by-election can reach around **₹130 crore per instance**.
- **Favoring ruling parties:** By-elections generally favor ruling parties due to their ability to mobilise resources and provide patronage. This creates an uneven playing field against opposition parties, undermining democratic fairness.
- **Repeated financial strain on defeated candidates:** Candidates who lose must bear the financial burden of campaigning again in by-elections if their opponent vacates a seat they won. This can strain party resources and discourage competitive politics.
- **Undermining democratic principles:** The practice of contesting multiple seats can prioritize candidates' interests over voters' needs, contradicting the democratic ideal that elections should serve the public.
- **Against freedom of speech and expression:** OCMC goes against the fundamental right to freedom of speech and expression of citizens. A petition filed in 2023 (**Ashwini Kumar Upadhyay vs Union of India**) argued that when people elect a representative, they trust that person to be their voice. Contesting multiple constituencies, winning them, and vacating one for a by-election **violates Article 19(1)(a) of the Constitution**.
- **Voter Apathy:** The practice leads to voter confusion and apathy, as seen in Wayanad when Rahul Gandhi vacated his seat after winning in 2024; voter turnout dropped significantly in subsequent by-elections compared to general elections.

SINCE THE CHALLENGES AND MISUSE OF OCMC

OUTWEIGHS THE BENEFITS, FOLLOWING REFORMS ARE RECOMMENDED

- **Amendment of Section 33(7) of RPA 1951:** A recommendation has been made to amend this section of the Representation of the People Act (RPA) 1951 to prohibit candidates from contesting multiple constituencies for the same office. The Election Commission of India (ECI) has consistently recommended this ban since 2004, the law commission in its 255th report has also recommended the same.
- **Recover cost for by-elections:** Implementing a system where the candidate who vacates a seat after winning must bear the full cost of conducting a by-election could discourage simultaneous contests.
- **Delay in by-elections:** Proposing that by-elections be held **after a year instead of within six months** could allow voters more time to make informed decisions and provide defeated candidates with an opportunity to prepare for future contests.

The practice has been phased out in mature democracies like the UK and other European democracies to **ensure democratic integrity**. Thus, if "one person, one vote" is the core democratic principle for voters, it is time to enforce **"one candidate, one constituency"**.

URBAN LOCAL GOVERNMENT ELECTIONS

#MUNICIPALITIES #ELECTORAL REFORMS

PRIMARY
SOURCE THE HINDU

*Ongoing discourse around 'one nation one election' can serve as the right opportunity to streamline the **Elections in Urban Local Government structures (ULGs)** which face the problem of neglect and delays in elections.*

IMPORTANCE OF TIMELY ELECTIONS IN ULGs

- India has **over 4,800 ULGs** that oversee nearly 40% of the population, which is estimated to cross 50% by 2050.
- Well administered cities are the backbone of the country's economy, contributing **over 60% to India's GDP**.
- Ensuring regular elections to install **democratically-elected governments** in our cities is not just

CONSTITUTION, POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

constitutionally mandated but also important for **economic and social development**.

CONSTITUTIONAL PROVISIONS REGARDING ELECTIONS TO ULGs

The system of Urban Government was constitutionalised through the **74th Constitutional Amendment Act** of 1992.

- **Article 243ZA** of the Constitution of India provided that the **superintendence, direction, and control** of electoral rolls, and the conduct of all elections to the municipalities should be vested in the **State Election Commission**.
 - **The State Election Commission** consists of a **state election commissioner** to be appointed by the governor.
 - The state legislature may make provision with respect to all matters relating to elections to the **municipalities**.
- **Article 243R**: Article 243R provided that all the seats in the municipality should be filled by persons chosen by **direct election from the territorial constituency** in the municipal area, known as "Ward".

ISSUES ASSOCIATED WITH ULGs

- **Uncertainty and Delays in Elections**: Over **60% of ULGs** in India experience delays in elections, violating the constitutional mandate to hold elections every five years. This undermines the **principle of decentralisation** and limits **citizen representation and accountability**.
- **Delay in Council Formation**: Even after elections are held, it is seen that there are **significant delays in constituting councils**. E.g., in Karnataka, councils took an average of **11 months** to form post-election results.
- **Disempowerment of State Election Commissions (SECs)**: SECs, responsible for conducting ULG elections, are often disempowered. Only **4 out of 15 states** have granted them authority for ward delimitation. The **state government inaction in ward delimitation** leads to delay in elections **or legal disputes over reservations (highlighted in CAG report)**.
- **Political influence and discretion**: State governments officials have the discretion to delay elections, which compromises integrity of the electoral process as highlighted in the Supreme Court ruling in **Suresh Mahajan v. State of Madhya Pradesh (2022)**.

- **Challenges with women's reservation**: In **Nagaland**, the government's attempt to hold ULG elections with a **33% reservation for women** faced backlash from tribal organisations opposed to this mandate. Thus, there is a broader struggle between **constitutional requirements and local customs**.
- **Impact on citizen participation**: A survey indicated that about **61% of ULGs** experienced delayed council elections. Delays in conducting timely elections negatively affect public participation and erosion of trust in local governance.

PAST EFFORTS TO RESOLVE THE ISSUE OF ELECTIONS TO LOCAL BODIES

- **79th report of Parliament Standing Committee on Law and Justice**: Presented report on the 'Feasibility of Simultaneous Elections,' submitted in 2015, while advocating simultaneous elections to the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies, was **silent on elections to ULGs**.
- **NITI Aayog discussion paper (2017)** on 'Analysis of Simultaneous Elections', **kept ULGs out of its purview**, arguing that the **third-tier institutions are State subjects** and that the sheer number of such institutions across the country makes it **impractical, and possibly impossible, to synchronise elections**.
- **High Level Committee (2024)**: HLC constituted by the Government of India to provide a road map for implementation of simultaneous elections, deliberated on local body elections and **recommended synchronising them within 100 days of simultaneous elections to the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies**.

WAY FORWARD

- **Empowering State Election Commissions (SECs)**: Grant SECs the authority to manage ward delimitation independently, ensuring that state governments do not interfere in the electoral process.
- **Timely Elections**: Establish a **legal framework** that mandates ULG elections to be conducted within six months of the term expiration of existing councils, ensuring adherence to democratic principles and timely representation.
- The HLC report was accepted by the Union government in September 2024, has touched upon the procedure of elections to local governments which can be **synchronised within 100 days of simultaneous**

CONSTITUTION, POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

elections to the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies after taking consultation with stakeholders.

POOR ELECTORAL PARTICIPATION OF OVERSEAS INDIAN VOTERS

#ELECTORAL REFORMS

PRIMARY
SOURCE

THE HINDU

*As per data released by Election Commission, **1,19,374 citizens are registered as overseas electors in 2024.** However, only 2,958 overseas electors flew down to India to participate in the General Elections.*

BACKGROUND

- The government of India has provisions to **allow its citizens to cast a vote** during an election in **three** different ways:
 - in Person
 - through Postal Voting
 - through Proxy Voting.

ABOUT OVERSEAS ELECTOR/VOTER

- Overseas elector:** A person who is a **citizen of India** and is eligible to be registered as a voter and **who is absent** from his place of ordinary residence in India owing to **employment, education** etc.
- He is eligible to be registered as a **voter in the constituency** as mentioned in his passport.
- As per the **Representation of People Act, 1950**, an Non Residential Indian (NRI) settled in foreign land can become an elector in the electoral roll in India.

ELIGIBILITY

- Every Indian citizen **aged 18 years** on the qualifying date, is eligible to be registered as a voter in the polling area of the constituency where he is ordinarily resident.
- A **non-citizen of India is not eligible for registration** as a voter in the electoral rolls.

Process for an Overseas Indian (NRI) to get Registered in the Electoral Roll:

- He has to **file an application** for the purpose before the **Electoral Registration Officer** of the constituency in place of his ordinary residence as given in his passport.

- The application accompanied by **self-attested copy** of the relevant documents can be filed:
 - in person before the concerned Electoral Registration Officer / Assistant Electoral Registration Officer or
 - sent by post addressed to him or
 - can be filed online on the website of the **Chief Electoral Officer** of the concerned state or the website of the **Election Commission of India**.
- Overseas Indians** are **not eligible for Proxy voting** as of now.

PROXY VOTING IN INDIA AND OVERSEAS VOTERS

- Proxy voting** allows a registered elector to **delegate his voting rights to a representative** he nominates.
- Proxy voting** is not available to overseas voters, it is currently limited to **classified service voters** serving in the armed forces or paramilitary forces only. The proxy also must be a **registered voter** of the same constituency.
 - In 2018, the 16th Lok Sabha passed a bill to **allow proxy voting rights to eligible overseas Indians**. The bill, however, could not be brought to the Rajya Sabha.
 - In 2020, the ECI proposed to the Union Law Ministry to extend the **Electronically Transmitted Postal Ballot System (ETPBS)** facility to eligible overseas Indian voters. So far, it is available only to the **service voters**.
 - Since it requires changes in the election rules, the government has so far **not taken a call on the issue**.

ELECTRONICALLY TRANSMITTED POSTAL BALLOT SYSTEM

- ETPBS is developed by the ECI and implemented in line with the existing **Postal Ballot System**.
- Postal Ballot** will be transmitted through electronic means to the voters. It enables the voters to cast their vote on an **electronically received postal ballot** from their preferred location, which is outside their originally assigned voting constituency, and send back the **marked postal ballot through the post**.

Hence, at present the overseas voters in India can only vote by being physically present at their polling station. The facility of **Proxy voting** and the **Electronically**

CONSTITUTION, POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

Transmitted Postal Ballot System (ETPBS) are not yet available to them.

DEMAND FOR MITHILANCHAL STATE

#STATE FORMATION

PRIMARY
SOURCE

THE HINDU

Bihar leader Rabri Devi has come forward with demand for creation of a separate Mithilanchal state to be carved out of existing Bihar.

PROVISIONS OF INDIAN CONSTITUTION

Article 2: Admission or Establishment of New States

- **Scope:** Article 2 of the Indian constitution has conferred the power on the **parliament of India** for admitting and establishing a new state **not originally part of India**.
- It deals with **external states** (E.g., integration of princely states post-independence).
- It **does not cover the reorganisation within existing Indian states** or admission of a Union Territory.

Article 3: Formation and Alteration of States

- Parliament may create new States by-
 1. separating territory from any State
 2. uniting two or more States
 3. uniting parts of States
 4. uniting any territory to a part of any State.
- Parliament's can also increase or diminish the area of any State and altering the boundaries or name of any State. (state here also includes a Union territory).

Note: Laws Made under Articles 2 and 3 are not considered as amendments to the Constitution under Article 368.

PROCEDURE FOR FORMATION OF NEW STATES

- A bill calling for formation of new States may be introduced in either House of Parliament **only on the recommendation of the President**.
- Such a bill must be referred by the President to the **concerned State Legislature for expressing its views to Parliament**, if it contains provisions which affect the areas, boundaries or name of that State.

- **Parliament is not bound by these views of the concerned State Legislature** in the process of enacting legislation for the formation of new States.

FACTORS DRIVING STATEHOOD DEMANDS

- **Linguistic Diversity** has been central to identity politics. **E.g.,** Formation of Maharashtra and Gujarat in 1960, as a result of the Mahagujarat and Samyukta Maharashtra movements.
- **Regional Inequities:** Economic neglect and underdevelopment in hope for better governance through smaller states. **E.g., Formation of Jharkhand** (2000) addressed tribal marginalisation in mineral-rich Chotanagpur Plateau.
- **Cultural and Ethnic Identity:** Groups with unique traditions, languages, and customs often seek statehood to preserve their distinctiveness. **E.g.,** Gorkhaland in West Bengal, Bodoland in Assam.
- **Administrative Efficiency:** Proponents argue smaller states are easier to administer and more responsive to local needs. **E.g.,** Demand for Purvanchal (eastern Uttar Pradesh) seeks to address governance issues in overpopulated, underdeveloped regions.

ARGUMENTS AGAINST FORMATION OF NEW STATES

- **Economic Burden:** Establishing new capitals and administrative structures involves significant costs. **E.g.,** Andhra Pradesh's plan for Amaravati capital infrastructure is estimated >₹40,000 crore.
- **Inter-State Disputes:** Resource sharing often becomes contentious. **E.g.,** Cauvery water dispute escalated after the reorganisation of states in southern India.
- **Boundary Conflicts** as boundary-drawing processes for new states may take a long time to resolve. **E.g.,** Belagavi dispute between Karnataka and Maharashtra is still pending.
- **Political Fragmentation** along parochial lines may weaken Indian federal structure. **E.g.,** Encourage further demands such as Vidarbha, Gorkhaland, and Rayalaseema.

WAY FORWARD

- **Equitable development** of underdeveloped regions within existing states to reduce grievances.
- **Outline explicit parameters for state formation**, i.e., state's economic viability, administrative effectiveness, and national interest. **E.g.,** Proposed state should be

CONSTITUTION, POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

capable of generating >50% of its required funds at the initial level to minimise reliance on Centre's aid.

- **Set up specialised committees** comprising members from relevant districts to assess the new state's implications.
- **Devolution of power** through Panchayati Raj Institutions and Municipal Reforms to cater to local needs without dividing the states.

MITHILANCHAL REGION



Geographical and historical details:

- **Mithila** (Tirhut or Mithilanchal) region spans across the **northern parts of Bihar** in India and extends into Terai region of Nepal.
- Characterised by its **fertile plains** formed by the rivers **Gandak, Bagmati, Kamala etc.**
- **Hindu mythology:** birthplace of Goddess Sita (the consort of Lord Rama).
- **Art/Crafts:** Renowned for **Madhubani painting**.
- **Literature:** **Maithili language** (a regional Indo-Aryan language).
- **Agrarian Economy:** cultivation of **rice, maize, pulses, and other crops**.
- **Social Structure:** Patriarchal system and traditional norms.

REMOVAL OF RAJYA SABHA CHAIRMAN

#EXECUTIVE

PRIMARY
SOURCE THE HINDU

Nearly 60 Opposition MPs of the INDIA bloc have submitted a notice at the office of the Rajya Sabha Secretary-General seeking the removal of the Chairperson of the Upper House, Vice-President Jagdeep Dhankhar.

VICE PRESIDENT

The Vice-President occupies the **second highest office** in the country, after the President of India. His office is modeled on the lines after the U.S. Vice-President.

QUALIFICATIONS

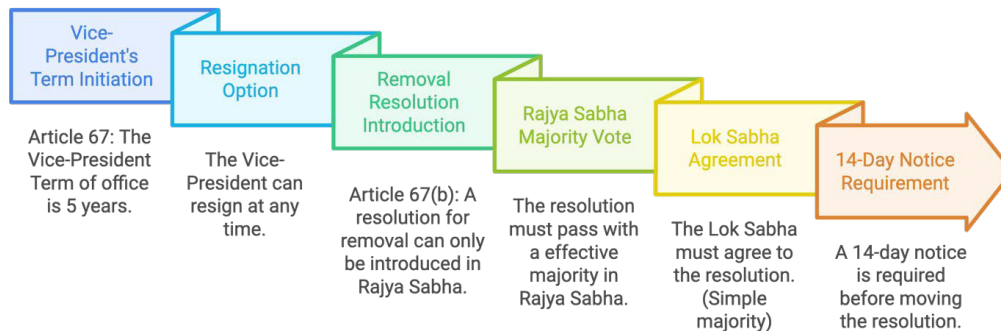
- To be eligible for election as Vice-President, a person should fulfil the following qualifications:
 1. citizen of India.
 2. completed 35 years of age.
 3. qualified for election as a member of the Rajya Sabha.
 4. should not hold any office of profit under the Union government or any state government or any local authority or any other public authority.

POWERS AND FUNCTIONS OF THE VICE-PRESIDENT

- He acts as the **ex-officio Chairman of Rajya Sabha**. In this capacity, his powers and functions are similar to those of the Speaker of Lok Sabha.
- **He acts as President** when a vacancy occurs in the office of the President due to his resignation, impeachment, death or otherwise.
 - He can act as President only for a **maximum period of six months**, within which a new President has to be elected.
 - When the sitting President is unable to discharge his functions due to absence, illness, the Vice-President discharges his functions, until he resumes his office.
- While discharging the functions of President, the Vice-President **does not perform** the duties of the office of the chairman of Rajya Sabha.
 - During this period, those duties are performed by the **Deputy Chairman of Rajya Sabha**.

CONSTITUTION, POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

Article 67 of Constitution of India Term of office and removal of Vice-President of India



REMOVAL OF VICE-PRESIDENT

- **Article 67:** Vice-President holds office for a term of **five years** from the date on which he enters upon his office.
- **Article 67(a):** He can resign from his office at any time by addressing the resignation letter to the President.
 - He can also be removed from the office before completion of his term.
 - A **formal impeachment is not required** for his removal.
- **Article 67(b):** He can be **removed by a resolution** passed by a majority of all the then members of the Rajya Sabha and agreed to by the Lok Sabha.
 - This resolution should be passed in the Rajya Sabha by an **effective majority** and in the Lok Sabha by a **simple majority**.
 - This resolution can be **introduced only in the Rajya Sabha** and not in the Lok Sabha.
 - No such resolution can be moved unless at least **14 days' advance notice has been given**.
 - Notably, **no ground has been mentioned in the Constitution for his removal**.
- Vice-President can hold office beyond his term of five years until his successor assumes charge. He is also **eligible for re-election** to that office. He may be elected for any number of terms.

Recently, Chief Justices were appointed to the eight High Courts across India. However, all of them, with the exception of one, will have **very short tenures**. This calls for urgent remedial action, since it affects the **institutional effectiveness of the judiciary**.

APPOINTMENT OF JUDGES

- **Article 217** of Constitution of India deals with **appointment of Judges of High Court**.
 - Judges of a High Court are appointed by the President.
 - **The Chief Justice of a high court is appointed by the President** after consultation with the Chief Justice of India and the governor of the state concerned.
 - For appointment of other judges, the chief justice of the concerned high court is also consulted.
 - In case of a common high court for two or more states, the **governors of all the states concerned** are consulted by the President.
- **Second Judges case (1993):** SC ruled that no appointment of a judge of the high court can be made, unless it is in conformity with the opinion of the chief justice of India.
- **Third Judges case (1998):** SC opined that in case of the appointment of high court judges, the chief justice of India should consult a collegium of two senior-most judges of the Supreme Court. Thus, the sole opinion of the chief justice of India alone does not constitute the 'consultation' process.
- **The 99th Constitutional Amendment Act of 2014** and the **National Judicial Appointments Commission Act of 2014** replaced the Collegium System of appointing judges to the Supreme Court and High Courts with a

CHIEF JUSTICES NEED LONGER TENURE

#JUDICIARY

PRIMARY
SOURCE THE HINDU

new body called National Judicial Appointments Commission (NJAC).

- **Fourth Judges case (2015):** SC declared both the **99th Constitutional Amendment as well as the NJAC Act as unconstitutional and void**, opining that NJAC would affect the independence of the judiciary. Consequently, the earlier collegium system became operative again.

TENURE OF JUDGES

The Constitution has **not fixed the tenure of a judge of a high court**. However, it makes the following four provisions in this regard:

1. He holds the office until the age of 62 years.
2. He can resign by writing to the **President**.
3. He can be removed from his office by the **President** on the recommendation of the Parliament.
4. He vacates his office when appointed as a judge of the Supreme Court or when transferred to another high court.

ROLE OF THE CHIEF JUSTICE OF A HIGH COURT

The Chief Justice is the **senior-most sitting judge of a High Court** in a State. Besides performing judicial functions, he also exercises administrative powers, as provided under **Article 229** of Indian Constitution.

- **Administrative Responsibilities:** Oversees the overall administration of the High Court. Constitutes various committees for smooth functioning.
- **Judicial Appointments:** Plays a key role in recommending names for judgeship.
- **Financial Oversight:** Tracks and ensures the financial health of the institution.
- **Staff discipline:** Takes disciplinary action against erring trial court judges and staff.
- **Legal Education and aid:** Addresses issues related to legal education in the State. The Chief Justice is also usually the patron in chief of the State's Legal service Authority.
- **Judicial Role:** Discharges duties as the highest judicial authority in the State.

Thus, keeping in mind the diverse role and functions carried out by the Chief Justice of High Courts, they should be provided with **either a longer tenure or a fixed tenure**.

CODE OF CONDUCT JUDGES NEED TO FOLLOW

#JUDICIARY

PRIMARY
SOURCE THE HINDU

Recent comments made by an Allahabad High Court judge against the Muslim community at an event organised by the legal cell of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad in the High Court premises, has drawn public flak.

Constitutional position of Judges in the context of Judicial Independence and Discipline:

- **Security of Tenure:** The only way to remove a judge is through the impeachment by Parliament, as stated in Article 124(4) of the Constitution.
- **Article 215** declares the High Court to be a court of record with contempt power which the judges could invoke.
- **Paragraph VIII of the Third Schedule** of the Constitution mandates a judge-designate to swear to perform duties without **fear or favor, affection, or ill-will**.
- Judges are expected to conduct themselves in a manner **consistent with the dignity of the judicial office**.

SOURCE OF POWERS OF JUDICIARY

- Judiciary draws its power from two fountains, **public acceptance of the authority of the judiciary** and the **integrity of the judiciary**. Over the time, the judiciary has codified the best conventions of judicial conduct in and out of court.
- The '**Restatement of Values of Judicial Life**' is the primary code of ethics governing judicial behaviour adopted by the Supreme Court in 1997.

NEED FOR INTEGRITY AND CODE OF CONDUCT IN JUDICIARY

- **Rule of Law:** To uphold the rule of law which is part of basic structure doctrine.
- **Institutional integrity:** To dispel the notion of favoritism, bias or interference and increased institutional responsibility.
- **Independence and accountability** walk hand in hand in a democratic setup.

CONSTITUTION, POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

- **Increase public confidence:** Necessary to increase public confidence in the public institutions.
- **Increase Trust:** Upholding trust in the institution of judiciary, independence must not become an alibi for arbitrariness.

CONCERNS RELATED TO JUDICIAL TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

- **Collegium system:** Appointment, promotion, and transfer of judges of higher judiciary is carried out by the collegium system with lack of transparency.
- **Allocation of cases:** Chief Justice allocates cases to different benches of the Court and picks judges to form Constitution Benches, which decide substantial questions of law. Since CJI has the full control over this, there are apprehensions that judges with similar school of thought are appointed in a bench to get a favourable judgement.
- **Power to list:** The Chief also enjoys the power to list cases. It means that if the CJI wishes to do so, they may never list a Constitution Bench case at all in their tenure.
- **Corruption:** Many cases in recent times have come to the notice regarding corruption in the Judiciary.
- **Passing remarks prejudicial to certain communities:** Present case of Justice Shekhar Yadav.

STEPS TAKEN SO FAR TO ARREST THE DECLINE OF JUDICIAL STANDARDS

- **RTI:** Office of CJI has been brought under the ambit of Right To Information Act, 2005.
- **Live streaming:** Live streaming of Cases has been proactively taken up by Supreme Court and High Courts.
- **National Judicial Data Grid:** Disclosure of pending cases with help of National Judicial Data Grid.
- **Declaration of Assets:** Supreme Court judges declare their property to the CJI.
- **The Restatement of Values of Judicial Life** which lays down certain judicial **standards and principles** to be observed and followed by the Judges of the Supreme Court and High Courts.
- **In-house procedure:** An in-house procedure for taking suitable remedial action against judges who do not follow **universally accepted values of judicial life** including those included in the Restatement of Values of Judicial life.

- **Bangalore principle of Judicial Conduct:** A judge must “reaffirm the people’s faith in the impartiality of the judiciary”. Principles underscore that “any act of a judge of the Supreme Court or a High Court, whether in official or personal capacity, which **erodes the credibility of this perception has to be avoided**”.

- Furthermore, a judge must always conduct himself or herself in such a manner as to **preserve the dignity of the judicial office and the impartiality and independence of the judiciary**”. More importantly, the charter requires a judge to be “aware of and understand” the **diversity in society and treat all equally**.

FURTHER MEASURES TO BE TAKEN FOR INCREASED ACCOUNTABILITY

- **Code of Conduct for Judges:** As recommended by 2nd ARC, there should be a **formal and comprehensive** code of conduct for judiciary which is legally enforceable.
- **Amendment of the Contempt of Court Act with specific provisions:**
 - Contempt cases to be tried by **an independent commission** instead of courts.
 - Removal of the words '**scandalizing the court or lowering the authority of the court**' from the definition of criminal contempt.
- **Imposition of stringent punishment** for the misuse of contempt laws, especially in cases involving false and malicious allegations against honest judges.
- **Establishment of a two-level judicial discipline model:**
 - First level: Disciplinary system capable of reprimanding, fining, or suspending judges for misdemeanors, along with limited immunity measures.
 - Second level: Removal system for judges engaged in serious misconduct, including corruption.
- **Enhanced transparency in court proceedings:** Live streaming of cases argued in High courts and Supreme Courts.
- **Some administrative mechanism to keep check on the probity of higher judiciary** as the removal process is stringent under Judges (Inquiry) Act 1968.
- **Establishment of an independent judicial Lokpal with the authority to:**

CONSTITUTION, POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

- Receive complaints against judges.
- Initiate action to ensure accountability.
- Operate independently from both the judiciary and the government.
- **Greater Internal Regulation:** Establishing a National Judicial Oversight Committee.
 - To implement prompt disciplinary actions at the first instance of misconduct.
 - Establish a **National Judicial Oversight Committee** through parliamentary intervention.
 - The committee should develop independent procedures to scrutinize complaints and conduct investigations.
 - Ensure that the committee's composition should not compromise judicial independence.
- **Enacting a Revised Judicial Standards and Accountability Bill:**
 - Introduce a new Judicial Standards and Accountability bill inspired by the lapsed Judicial Standards and Accountability Bill 2010.

SHOULD ASSISTED DYING BE LEGALISED?

#GOVERNANCE

PRIMARY SOURCE THE HINDU

Recently, the House of Commons in the United Kingdom voted in favour of the *Terminally Ill Adults (End of Life) Bill* to **legalise assisted dying**. The Bill allows terminally ill patients to **request assistance** to end their own life.

India has **legalised passive euthanasia** (withdrawing life support for terminally ill patients) through the Supreme Court's ruling.

WHAT ARE ASSISTED DYING, ASSISTED SUICIDE AND EUTHANASIA?

1. Assisted Dying:

- Assisted dying generally refers to a person who is **terminally ill receiving lethal drugs** from a medical practitioner, **where** the patient **self-administers** the medication.
- **Legal status in India:** Not recognised or permitted under the Indian law. It is viewed as a form of suicide.
- **Note:**

- Suicide was decriminalised in India through the **Mental Healthcare Act (MHCA), 2017**.
- However, abetting or aiding someone to suicide is **punishable** under section 306 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC).

2. Assisted Suicide:

- Assisted suicide is **intentionally helping another person to end their life**, including someone who is not terminally ill. That could **involve providing lethal medication** or helping them travel to another jurisdiction to die.
- **Legal status in India:** Prohibited under the Indian law. **Assisting** someone to suicide is punishable under section 306 of IPC.

3. Euthanasia:

- Euthanasia is the act of **deliberately ending a person's life** to relieve suffering in which a **lethal drug is administered by a physician**. Patients may not be terminally ill.
- There are **two types**:
 - Voluntary euthanasia where consent is given by a patient.
 - Non-voluntary where a patient cannot consent. (E.g., they are in a coma).

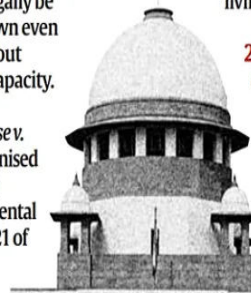
IN THE SUPREME COURT

2011: *Aruna Shanbaug v. Union of India* recognised that life-sustaining treatment could legally be withheld/withdrawn even from persons without decision-making capacity.

of India, and legalised the use of advance medical directives or 'living wills'.

2018: *Common Cause v. Union of India* recognised the right to die with dignity as a fundamental right under Article 21 of the Constitution

2023: *Common Cause v. Union of India* simplified the process for making living wills and withholding/withdrawing life-sustaining treatment by removing bureaucratic hurdles.



- **Legal status in India:**
 - **Active Euthanasia:** It means killing a patient by active means (injecting a patient with a lethal dose of a drug). Active Euthanasia is **illegal** in India and a crime under section 302 or section 304 of IPC. (Section 100 and 102 of BNS)
 - **Passive Euthanasia:** **Legal** in India. It is the refusal of treatment, or withdrawal of life support, to allow a patient to die.

CONSTITUTION, POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

DEVELOPMENTS REGARDING 'RIGHT TO DIE WITH DIGNITY'

- **Aruna Shanbaug vs. Union of India, 2011:** In the landmark judgement, the Supreme Court, issued a set of broad guidelines **legalising passive euthanasia** in India. Life-sustaining treatment could be legally withdrawn from the persons in vegetative state without decision-making capacity.
- **Common Cause vs Union of India 2018:** SC recognised the right to **refuse medical treatment** even if it might result in death (i.e., Right to die with dignity) as a **fundamental right** under Article 21 (Right to life and personal liberty) of the Indian Constitution. It recognised **'living wills' or 'advance medical directive'**.
- **Common Cause vs Union of India 2023:** SC simplified the **process** of executing 'Advance Medical Directive' or 'living wills' for terminally ill patients.
- **September 2024:** Draft guidelines were published by the **Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW)** for the 'Withdrawal of Life Support in Terminally ill Patients' in compliance with the Supreme Court's 2018 and 2023 orders on the right to die with dignity.

PRISONS IN INDIA: ISSUES & REFORMS

#GOVERNANCE REFORMS

PRIMARY
SOURCE THE HINDU

Recently, the Indian President released a report titled **"Prisons in India: Mapping Prison Manuals and Measures for Reformation and Decongestion"**. A significant recommendation in the report was **electronic tracking of prisoners** to prevent overcrowding of prisons.

ISSUES FACED BY PRISONS IN INDIA

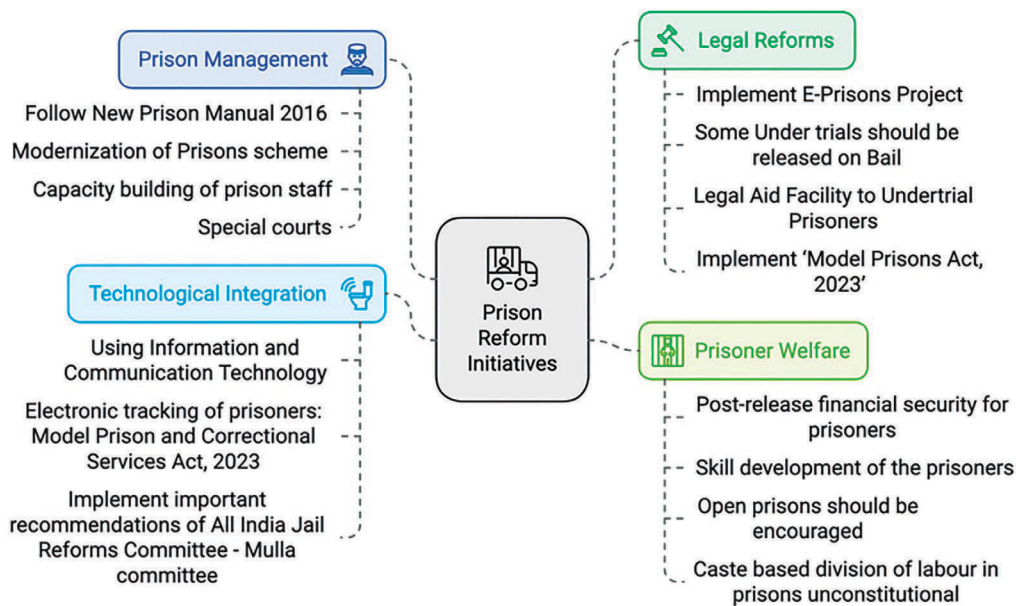
- **Overcrowding:** Overall occupancy rate of Indian prisons was 131% in 2022 (down from 140% in 2007). Occupancy rate is the number of inmates staying in jails against authorised capacity for 100 inmates.
- **Prisons dominated by Undertrials:** As per Prison Statistics 2020 Report, 75% of prisoners are **undertrials**. The number of undertrial prisoners has increased by 11.7% from 2019.
- **Increased instances of unnatural deaths,** including suicide, murder by inmates, death due to assault, firing, etc.
- **Understaffing of Prisons:** As per Prison Statistics Report 2020, shortage of over 15,000 jail staff as on December **2020**, against the sanctioned strength of jail-staff.
- **Socio-economic discrimination** of the prisoner in the prison **system**. **E.g.,** Caste-based division of labour in prisons.
 - In 2024, Chief Justice DY Chandrachud led bench said that assigning the work of cleaning and sweeping to marginalised castes is an instance of direct discrimination under **Article 15(1) of the Constitution**.
- **Poor mental & physical health:** Overcrowding, poor sanitary facilities, lack of decent health care, increase the likelihood of health problems.
- **Absence of reformatory approach** in the Indian prison system has resulted in ineffective integration/rehabilitation of prisoners with society. Also, has failed to provide them productive engagement opportunities after their release.

WAY FORWARD

1. Effective implementation of New Prison Manual 2016:

- MHA has approved New Prison Manual 2016 based on **Article 39A** which aims at uniformity in laws regarding administration of prisons and management of prisoners across India.
- Guidelines to be followed as per Prison Manual 2016 includes:
 - Under Trial Review Committee to be set up in each district
 - Earliest release of under trials as per the provision of law
 - Setting up a legal aid clinic in every prison
 - Improvement in living conditions of jails specially for women
 - Management Information System to be in place in all jails
 - Legal literacy classes in prisons.

CONSTITUTION, POLITY AND GOVERNANCE



2. E-Prisons Project:

- The E-Prisons project aims at **computerisation** of the functioning of prisons in the country, has been operationalised in all States and Union Territories.
- E-Prisons data has been integrated with the Police and Court system under the **Inter-operable Criminal Justice System**.
- **The E-prisons project** supplements the Prisoner **Information Management system** (PIMS), developed by the National Informatics Centre.

3. Implement 'Model Prisons Act, 2023':

- It aims at **reforming prison management** and ensuring the transformation of inmates into law-abiding citizens and their rehabilitation.
- It lays emphasis on safety of women & transgender prisoners.
- It focuses on vocational training and skill development of prisoners.

4. Electronic tracking of Prisoners:

- **Model Prison and Correctional Services Act, 2023** has introduced the use of **electronic monitoring technology** as a condition for granting prison leaves for prisoners.
- It will further ensure **decongestion of prisons**, cut expenses associated with maintaining high incarceration rates and encourage good conduct by linking it with parole or furlough opportunities.

5. Special fast-track courts should be set up to deal exclusively with petty offences where imprisonment does not exceed 3 years.

6. Capacity building and proper training for prison staff on how to treat and deal with inmates.

7. Open prisons should be encouraged (special jails that exclusively confine only convicted prisoners).

8. Implement recommendations of All India Jail Reforms Committee - Mulla committee. Establish **National Prison Commission** to oversee the modernisation of the prisons in India.

PRAGATI (PRO-ACTIVE GOVERNANCE AND TIMELY IMPLEMENTATION)

#GOVERNANCE

PRIMARY SOURCE *The Indian EXPRESS*

A recent case study by Oxford titled '**From Gridlock to Growth: How Leadership Enables India's PRAGATI Ecosystem to Power Progress**', has spotlighted **PRAGATI (Pro-Active Governance and Timely Implementation)** as a game-changer in India's digital governance landscape.

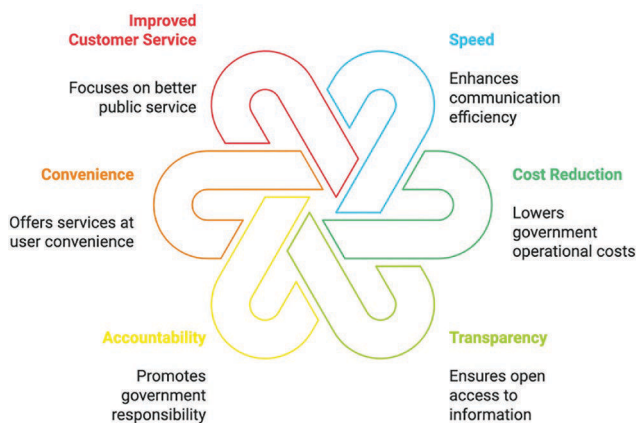
ABOUT PRAGATI

- **PRAGATI** (Pro-Active Governance and Timely Implementation) is a **multi-modal interactive platform** launched in 2015.

CONSTITUTION, POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

- It is **aimed at addressing** grievances of citizens and simultaneously monitoring and reviewing important programmes and projects of the Government at Centre & State level.
- It is a robust system for bringing **e-transparency and e-accountability** with real-time presence and exchange among the key stakeholders.
 - It combines leadership with **video conferencing, geo-spatial technology (drone feeds), and digital data management** to enable **oversight of critical infrastructure**.
- Since its inception, it has helped accelerate more than **340 major infrastructure projects worth some \$205 billion**.

The Multifaceted Benefits of e-Governance



ADVANTAGES OF PRAGATI

- Active Oversight:** Direct involvement of the Prime Minister ensures consistent monitoring and resolution of delays. It also encourages urgency and accountability among bureaucrats, engineers and key stakeholders.
- Digital tools for Project Management:** Integrates video conferencing, drone feeds, and data management for effective oversight enabling transparent tracking of progress and bottlenecks faced in the project.
- Encourages cooperation** between central and state governments, various stakeholders promoting **cooperative federalism**.
- Promotes swift resolution** of project delays and resolves bureaucratic hurdles at the top level.
- Role model for Platforms:** It has inspired creation of platforms like **PM Gati Shakti** (geospatial planning) and **PARIVESH** (streamlined environmental clearances) and

created a comprehensive digital ecosystem for infrastructure development.

- Economic Impact:** RBI studies have shown that every **₹1 spent on infrastructure yields a ₹2.5-3.5 gain in GDP**, thus it will support India's growth towards becoming the **third-largest economy by 2027**.

SUCCESS STORIES

- Completion of Long-Delayed Projects: National Highway 8 (Maharashtra), Chenab Bridge (Jammu and Kashmir), Bogibeel Bridge (Assam):** Completed within 3 years after a decade of stagnation.
- Accelerated Social Development**
- Programs:** Improved **rural electrification** and provision of tap water connections to millions of households.
- Reduced delays in infrastructure and environmental clearances:** PARIVESH reduced clearance times from **600 days to 70-75 days**.

PM CARES FUND

#GOVERNMENT INSTITUTIONS

PRIMARY SOURCE THE HINDU

In 2022-23, the PM CARES Funds received Rs 909.64 crore as voluntary contributions and Rs 2.57 crore as foreign contributions.

ABOUT THE PM CARES FUND

- PM Cares** (Prime Minister's Citizen Assistance and Relief in Emergency Situations Fund) was created on **27 March 2020**, following the COVID-19 pandemic in India.
- It was registered as a **Public Charitable** Trust under the Registration Act, 1908.
- Objectives:** A dedicated fund to **deal with any kind of emergency or distress situation** (either man-made or natural) and to provide financial assistance to the affected population.

KEY DETAILS OF THE PM CARES FUND

- Consists entirely of **voluntary contributions** from individuals/organisations and **does not get any budgetary support**.
- Donations to PM CARES Fund would qualify for **80G benefits for 100% exemption under the Income Tax Act, 1961**.

CONSTITUTION, POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

- Donations to PM CARES Fund will also qualify to be counted as **Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) expenditure under the Companies Act, 2013**.
- The Fund is **not classified as a public authority** under the RTI Act, limiting public access to its contributions, operations and decision-making processes.
- It is also **exempted from audit** by India's **Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG)**.
- PM CARES Fund has also got **exemption under the FCRA** (Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act, 2010 and a separate account for receiving foreign donations has been opened.
- This enables PM CARES Fund to accept donations and contributions from individuals and organisations based in foreign countries.
- This is consistent with respect to the **Prime Minister's National Relief Fund (PMNRF)**. PMNRF has also received foreign contributions as a public trust since 2011.
- **Prime Minister is the ex-officio Chairman of the PM CARES Fund**. The Minister of Defence, Minister of Home Affairs and Minister of Finance, Government of India are ex-officio Trustees of the Fund.

PRACTICE QUESTIONS

MCQS

Q1. Consider the following statements with reference to the provisions under the section 197(1) of the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC):

1. Public servants cannot be prosecuted for actions performed in their official capacity without prior approval from the relevant government authority.
2. Prior sanction is required even when public servants are accused of crimes such as rape and sexual harassment.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 only (b) 2 only
(c) Both 1 and 2 (d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q2. Which of the following statements regarding the PM CARES Fund is/are correct?

1. The PM CARES Fund is entirely funded by voluntary contributions and does not receive budgetary support from the Government of India.
2. Donations to the PM CARES Fund qualify for 100% tax exemption under the Income Tax Act, 1961.
3. The Finance Minister is the ex-officio Chairman of the PM CARES Fund.

Select the correct answer using the code given below:

- (a) 1 and 2 only (b) 2 and 3 only
(c) 1 and 3 only (d) 1, 2, and 3

Q3. Consider the following statements:

1. The Chairman and the Deputy Chairman of the Rajya Sabha are not the members of that House.
2. While the nominated members of the two Houses of the Parliament have no voting right in the presidential election, they have the right to vote in the election of the Vice President.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 only (b) 2 only
(c) Both 1 and 2 (d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q4. Which of the following statements regarding overseas electors in India is/are correct?

1. An overseas elector must be a citizen of India and should not have acquired the citizenship of another country.
2. Proxy voting is currently available to overseas Indian voters.
3. The Electronically Transmitted Postal Ballot System (ETPBS) is currently unavailable to overseas voters for casting their votes.

Select the correct answer using the code given below:

- (a) 1 and 2 only (b) 2 and 3 only
(c) 1 and 3 only (d) 1, 2 and 3

CONSTITUTION, POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

Q5. Right to Privacy is protected as an intrinsic part of Right to Life and Personal Liberty. Which of the following in the Constitution of India correctly and appropriately imply the above statement?

(a) Article 14 and the provisions under the 42nd Amendment to the Constitution

(b) Article 17 and the Directive Principles of State Policy in Part IV

(c) Article 21 and the freedoms guaranteed in Part III

(d) Article 24 and the provisions under the 44th Amendment to the Constitution

DESCRIPTIVE QUESTIONS

Q1. The prisons in India face several challenges which impound on the human rights of prisoners and prevent their integration in the society. Analyse the issues facing prisons in India and highlight the policy initiatives taken by the government to address these issues.

Q2. "Institutional quality is a crucial driver of economic performance". In this context suggest reforms in the Civil Service for strengthening democracy.

Answers: 1-a, 2-a, 3-b, 4-c, 5-c

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS & SECURITY

GS PAPER (PRELIMS) & GS PAPER II & III (MAIN)

INDIA-CHINA RELATIONS: DEVELOPMENTS & CHALLENGES

#BILATERAL RELATIONS #SOUTH ASIA

PRIMARY SOURCE THE HINDU

Recently, the Indian Minister of Foreign Affairs told the Parliament that India and China ties are set in the direction of improvement. He credited **continuous diplomatic engagement** and a **step-by-step approach** with China in achieving **disengagement at the border**; the situation which had been **abnormal since 2020**.



RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

- In an agreement announced on **21 October 2024**, the Indian Army, and People's Liberation Army (PLA) forces agreed to disengage troops at **Demchok and Depsang** and proceed towards **de-escalating tensions** along the Line of Actual Control (LAC).
- As a result of this recent understanding, the **disengagement** from all friction points at the LAC has now been **fully achieved**. The next priority is **de-escalation**, or the withdrawal of troops from the area, along with **management of border areas**.

INDIA-CHINA SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE MECHANISM

- India-China Special Representative Mechanism was constituted in **2003** to comprehensively address the

vexed dispute of the India-China border spanning 3488 km. The SRs mechanism over the years had met 22 times till 2019.

- Recently, the **Special Representatives** from both sides met after five years (December 2024) to discuss various issues like discussing border issues, affirming outcome of LAC disengagement, restoration of bilateral ties, discussions regarding **resumption of Man Sarovar yatra** and to discuss border trade.

HOWEVER, CRITICS ARGUE THAT SOME KEY ISSUES ARE REMAINING

- Terms of disengagement:** There is no definitive information on terms of disengagement in **Depsang and Demchok** along with uncertainty over Indian troops resuming patrolling at traditional points (Depsang Plains, Charding La, CNN junction).
- Patrolling dynamics:** Extent of Chinese patrols on the Indian side of the LAC remain unanswered, similarly:
 - Concept of **coordinated patrolling** and its impact on Indian patrol size and frequency.
 - Effects of **temporary and limited steps** on Indian patrol access and grazing grounds.
- Concerns regarding status quo:** Despite the government's stance, the status quo along the border appears altered by China since April 2020. Various military experts indicate restricted access to traditional patrolling points.
- Buffer Zones and Territorial Impact:** Creation of buffer zones has territorial implications for India. There is a need to prioritize restoring **status quo ante** for patrolling and grazing.

Disengagement along LAC

Patrolling arrangement
Foreign secretary Vikram Misri said India and China have arrived at an agreement on "patrolling arrangements" along the LAC, "leading to disengagement and a resolution of the issues that had arisen in these areas in 2020."

Resolving pending fissures
The breakthrough in negotiations will pave the way to solve the dragging impasse in Depsang Plains and Demchok, thus far the two remaining friction points in eastern Ladakh.

How the impasse began
Standoff on the LAC began with a skirmish between Indian and Chinese troops on the banks of Pangong Lake in May 2020. A brutal clash at Galwan Valley in June 2020 killed 20 Indian soldiers and an unspecified number of Chinese troops.

"We reached an agreement on patrolling. With that...we have gone back to where the situation was in 2020, and...the disengagement process with China, you can say, has been completed."
- S Jaishankar, external affairs minister

- **Eastern sector concerns:** Reports of Chinese patrols in Yangtse (Arunachal Pradesh) have not been addressed.
- **Policy Consistency:** While the Army reiterates the need for **April 2020 status quo**, the MEA no longer mentions restoration of status quo ante, which could risk China's **grey-zone advancements**.

SIGNIFICANCE OF STABLE RELATIONS WITH CHINA

- **Enhanced Border Stability:** De-escalation would prevent future clashes & allow resources to be diverted to developmental priorities.
- **Economic Interests:**
 - A stable relationship is crucial as China is India's largest trading partner and 3rd largest export market.
 - 2/3rd of India's total Active Pharma Ingredients is sourced from China.
- **Energy Security:**
 - Cooperation with China is necessary to receive hydrological information of transborder rivers (Brahmaputra) to secure India's Hydroelectric potential.
 - Being two major importers of oil in Asia, their cooperation would increase their bargaining power to avoid "Asian Premium".

- China controls ~90% of global rare-earth metals production. >80% of Solar modules and cells are imported from China. They are crucial to emerging technologies (renewable energy and electric vehicles).

Geopolitical Leverage:

- China's support is necessary for India's Nuclear Suppliers Group membership.
- Resolving disputes boosts India's credibility, enhancing its bid for permanent UNSC seat.

Counterbalancing Western Dominance:

- India and China can challenge Western hegemony, pushing for reforms in WTO, IMF, and UN.
- It could promote balance of power within Asia and deter aggressive policies by the West.

WAY FORWARD

- **Strengthen diplomatic dialogue:** India should prioritise continuous diplomatic dialogues with China to solidify the agreements reached and prevent future escalations and misunderstandings.
- **Enhance border infrastructure and defence preparedness:** India should invest in improving border infrastructure and logistics to support troop mobility and supply lines.
- **Transparency and consensus-based decisions:** There is a need for greater transparency from the

government, at the same time opposition should avoid politicizing the issue and aim for a broad consensus on China policy.

- Past examples (1996 and 2005 agreements) show effective collaboration when Opposition was briefed confidentially.
- **Respect consistent position:** India's consistent position is that "the maintenance of peace and tranquility in border areas is a pre-requisite for the development of our ties" which needs to be conveyed.

While challenges persist due to China's assertive policies, sustained diplomatic engagement and strategic preparedness is crucial for securing India's interests and ensuring regional balance in Asia.

SRI LANKAN PRESIDENT IS ON INDIA VISIT

#NEIGHBOURHOOD #SOUTH ASIA

PRIMARY
SOURCE THE HINDU

After sweeping Presidential and Parliamentary elections, Sri Lankan President Dissanayake is on his maiden visit to India. He met the Indian Prime Minister and has requested to continue its grants assistance to Sri Lanka and help it tide over its economic problems.

KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM THE VISIT

- **Security:** Two leaders discussed various issues including **regional security, digital infrastructure, connectivity,** and **energy projects,** as well as the Tamil issue and rights of fishermen.
 - India has often raised concern about Chinese **ships berthing** in Sri Lankan ports.
- **Financial Assistance:** India announced it would convert loans given to Sri Lanka into grants for railway signalling systems and the **Kankesanthurai port** and extended a **\$20.66 million grant** to settle payment for projects already completed, which had originally been signed under a '**Letter of Credit**' or loan.
- **Energy Security:** The two countries agreed to continue their partnership on energy projects, including connecting to a common grid, an India-Sri Lanka "**multi-product pipeline**" with UAE support, **LNG**

supplies, and completing the **Sampur coal power project.**

- **Cooperation at Multilateral forums:** President Dissanayake has requested India to support Sri Lanka's bid to join extended **BRICS** grouping of emerging economies and for India's intervention on the **United Nations Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf** for the establishment of the outer limits of the continental shelf beyond Exclusive Economic Zone, which Sri Lanka has asked for.

INDIA-SRI LANKA BILATERAL TIES

- **Strategic:** India and Sri Lanka share membership in **SAARC, BIMSTEC and IORA.**
 - Pursuing Strong ties with Sri Lanka is an integral part of India's **Neighborhood first policy.**
- **Trade and Investment:**
 - Sri Lanka remains among the largest trade partners of India in the SAARC.
 - India was Sri Lanka's largest trading partner with an overall bilateral merchandise trade of US \$5.45 billion in 2021.
 - **India and Sri Lanka entered into a Free trade agreement** in 2000. The two countries are negotiating the Economic and Technology Co-operation Agreement (**ETCA**).
 - **Debt relief:** India has played a key role in Sri Lanka debt relied on deals from the IMF.
 - Sri Lanka also provides **investment opportunities** for Indian Infrastructure companies. **E.g.,** Colombo port west terminal project.
- **Connectivity:** Transshipment ports of Sri Lankan like Colombo and Hambantota handle huge cargo that comes to India.
 - **Maritime Connectivity:** Cooperation in developing ports and logistics at Colombo, Trincomalee, and Kankesanthurai to consolidate regional logistics and shipping.
 - **Maritime Security Cooperation:** Inauguration of the Maritime Rescue Coordination Centre (MRCC) to enhance maritime security, with installations across Sri Lanka's coastline.

- **Trade, Economic, and Financial Connectivity:** Operationalise UPI-based digital payments to enhance trade and transactions.
- **People-to-People Connectivity.**
- **Energy and Power Connectivity:**
 - **Power Grid Interconnection:** Plan to establish a high-capacity power grid interconnection for electricity trade between Sri Lanka and other regional countries.
 - **Undersea Transmission Line:** Ongoing project for a USD 1.2 billion undersea transmission line linking Sri Lanka's power grid with India to ensure energy security.
- **Tourism:** Huge scope for religious tourism (Buddhist tourism) and medical tourism (Sri Lankan patients frequently visit Chennai for medical treatment)

ISSUE AND CHALLENGES IN RELATIONSHIP

- **Ethnic issues:** Long drawn ethnic conflicts and human rights violation of Tamils, lack of proper rehabilitation and insufficient devolution of powers (Under 13th Amendment act) to the northern Tamil provinces strained the relation between the two countries.
- **UNHRC resolution:** India voted against Sri Lanka in UNHRC resolutions in the past (2012 & 2013).
- **Fishermen issues:** Sri Lankan fishermen object to Indians using bottom trawlers and fishing illegally along their coast, which often leads to arrests of the Indians. The dispute status of **Kachateevu** islands is still not resolved.
- **Growing trust deficit:**
 - Scrapping of Indian infrastructure projects like Colombo east container terminal project at a time when China is increasing its investments in the same Colombo port city.
 - India's passive response to Sri Lanka's request for a debt repayment waiver for 3 years and a separate currency swap for \$1 billion to help with the economic crisis.
- **China factor:**
 - Sri Lanka gave approval to the Chinese funded '**Colombo port city**' with some autonomy.
 - China has developed the Hambantota port which was later leased to it for a period of 99 years.

- Sri Lanka has already endorsed the Belt & Road Initiative of China.

KATCHATHEEVU ISLAND ISSUE

1. Geographical Location: A 285-acre island located within the maritime boundary line of Sri Lanka. **Proximity to India and Sri Lanka:** Situated 33 km off the Indian coast to the northeast of Rameswaram in Tamil Nadu and southwest of Sri Lanka's Delft Island.

**HISTORICAL CONTROL AND OWNERSHIP**

Ramanad Kingdom: The island was historically under the control of Ramanad Raja, a zamindari in Ramanathapuram in the Madras Presidency during British rule (1795 to 1803).

DISPUTED CLAIMS

- **India and Sri Lanka's Claims:** Both countries have been claiming Katchatheevu since at least 1921, following a survey that placed the island within Sri Lanka's boundaries.
- **Contestation by British Indian Delegation:** The British Indian delegation contested Sri Lanka's claim, citing the historical ownership of the Ramanad kingdom.

1974 AGREEMENT

- In 1974, during Indira Gandhi's tenure as Prime Minister, India and Sri Lanka signed an agreement that **transferred Katchatheevu to Sri Lanka**.
- **Fishermen's Rights:** The agreement allowed Indian fishermen "access to Katchatheevu for rest, drying of

nets, and participation in the annual St. Anthony's festival."

- **Lack of Clarity on Fishing Rights:** The agreement did not specify the fishing rights of Indian fishermen, leaving a critical issue unresolved.

SHEIKH HASINA EXTRADITION: INDIA'S OPTIONS

#BILATERAL AGREEMENTS #SOUTH ASIA

PRIMARY
SOURCE THE HINDU

The Dhaka-based **International Crimes Tribunal** on October 17 issued arrest warrants for Ms. Sheikh Hasina (former Prime Minister of Bangladesh). Bangladesh has **recently formally requested India** to extradite the former Prime Minister.

BACKGROUND

- After **leaving Dhaka** on August 5, 2024, Ms. Hasina was declared an absconder for not surrendering. A first information report was filed against her and other former associates.
- She has been **charged with conspiracy to eliminate the students involved in protests**, and the mistreatment and killing of hundreds of the protesters, which are labelled as genocide and crimes against humanity.
- Subsequently, on **December 23, 2024**, Bangladesh formally requested India to extradite former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, who fled to New Delhi amid anti-government protests in August 2024.

LEGAL FRAMEWORK

- Bangladesh's legal system **allows for trials in absentia**, but there are complexities regarding International law and Common law jurisdictions as accused must be present in Court (physical or virtual) for the trial.
- India has **not yet commented** on the extradition request. India has a **bilateral extradition treaty** with Bangladesh but is **not obligated to extradite Hasina** due to claims of political offenses.

- India's Supreme Court in *National Human Rights Commission vs State Of Arunachal Pradesh & Anr.* (1996) has ruled that **non-citizens are entitled to protection of Article 21 under the Constitution**, which could influence decisions regarding Hasina's extradition.

CAN BE A LONG PROCESS UNDER '13 PACT

➤ Hasina (pic) is in India since her Aug 5 ouster. A B'desh tribunal has issued arrest warrants against her for **'crimes against humanity, genocide'**

➤ Monday's **request to India made through a 'note verbale'** (formal diplomatic note)

➤ B'desh home adviser Jahangir Alam claims she can be extradited under 2013 pact with India

➤ But it can be a

lengthy and complex affair, given that **Hasina will most certainly challenge it in court**

➤ Also, **India needs to balance its legal commitments with geopolitical considerations**

➤ According to Article 8 of treaty, **extradition may be refused** if Hasina can convince India that charges against her not 'made in good faith in interests of justice'



OPTIONS BEFORE INDIA

- **House Arrest:** India can place Hasina under house arrest while allowing her participation in her trial via video conferencing, ensuring cooperation with Bangladesh's investigation.
- **ICC Jurisdiction:** ICC jurisdiction can be invoked due to the nature of the alleged crimes. However, since Bangladesh is pursuing domestic legal action, ICC intervention may not be necessary unless there are concerns about the fairness of the proceedings.
- **Refuse extradition:** India can refuse extradition, citing lack of "good faith" or "interest of justice" and related concerns. Article 8 lists out multiple grounds for refusal including cases in which, an accusation has not been made in good faith in the interests of justice or in case of military offences which are not an offence under the general criminal law.

WAY FORWARD

- Maintain **diplomatic engagement** with the new government in Bangladesh.
- **Avoid hasty decisions** to ensure long-term strategic and economic ties with Bangladesh.
- Leverage the **structural linkages with the party in power as well as association and geographic realities** to sustain favorable relations.

INDIA BANGLADESH EXTRADITION TREATY

- **Establishment:** Signed in **2013** and amended in **2016** for faster and easier extradition of fugitives between the two countries.
- **Background:**
 - India sought the treaty to address insurgents from the **North-East** operating from Bangladesh.
 - Bangladesh aimed to address the presence of groups like **Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB)** in India.
 - India extradited **Anup Chetia**, a United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) leader, in 2015.

Provisions of the Treaty:

- **Extraditable Offences:**
 - Crimes carrying a **minimum punishment of one year** imprisonment, including financial crimes.
 - Offences must fulfill the **principle of dual criminality** (punishable in both countries).
 - Includes attempts, aiding, abetting, inciting, or participating in the commission of an extraditable offence.
- **Exceptions:**
 - Extradition can be refused if the offence is of a **political nature**.
 - However, the treaty specifies a **long list of offences not considered political**, including:
 - Murder, culpable homicide, assault, explosions, use of firearms, property damage intending to endanger life, kidnapping, hostage-taking, incitement to murder, and terrorism-related offences.
- **Amendment in 2016 to Simplify Extradition Process**
 - Requirement to provide evidence of the offence was removed; only an arrest warrant from a competent court is now required.
 - Since Sheikh Hasina faces multiple arrest warrants issued in Bangladesh, it makes her case eligible under the amended treaty.

Key Principles:

- Both countries commit to extraditing individuals wanted by courts for **criminal charges**,

prosecution, or conviction in the requesting country.

- The treaty intends to enhance cooperation in combating **terrorism and transnational crime**.

INDIA'S OBLIGATIONS TOWARDS ROHINGYA REFUGEES

#INTERNATIONAL CONVENTIONS AND HUMAN
RIGHTS

PRIMARY
SOURCE THE HINDU

*A recent study was conducted by the Azadi Project and Refugee International on the plight of the Rohingya refugees, which **highlighted the gross violation of human and constitutional rights** in the refugee camps.*

ROHINGYA REFUGEES

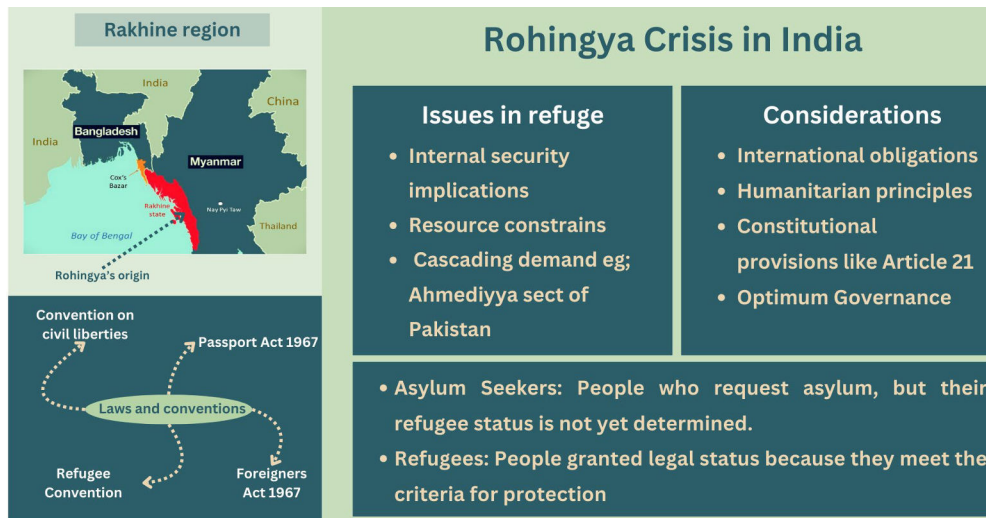
- Rohingya **people of Myanmar** constitute the world's largest stateless population in the world estimating about 2.8 million. The group is denied citizenship, rights and faced genocide in the **Myanmar's Rakhine region**.
- As per the **United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)**, India hosts a Rohingya population of 22,500 refugees.

INDIA'S STAND ON ROHINGYA REFUGEES

- India is **neither a signatory** to the **Refugee Convention**, nor a party to the key International instruments such as:
 - Conventions against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment
 - International Convention for the Protection of all Persons from Enforced Disappearance.
- Therefore, India **maintains no legal obligations** to provide asylum and adhere to non-refoulement.
 - **Policy of Non-refoulement** prohibits returning individuals to places where they face persecution, torture, or serious harm, protecting refugee and human rights.
- India **continues to detain Rohingya refugees** under domestic acts like:

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS & SECURITY

- The **Foreigners Act, 1967** regulates the entry, stay, and departure of foreigners in India, along with deportation of the illegal migrants in India
- The **Passport Act, 1967** governs the issuance and regulation of passports in India
- India categorises Rohingya refugees as '**Illegal Migrants**'.
- **Additional Information:**
 - **Case regarding Rohingyas:** 'Mohammad Salimullah versus Union of India 2021' rejected the plea to prevent deportation of 170 Rohingya illegal migrants. **The Supreme Court** rejected the plea stating the right to reside is not a right under Article 21.
 - The matters regarding Citizenship are part of the **Union list** in Schedule VII.

**ARGUMENTS FOR NON-REFOULEMENT OF ROHINGYAS**

- **International Obligation:** India is a signatory to the **International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights**, whose Article 7 refrains from the refoulement of refugee to a place where that can face torture or cruel treatment.
- **Lack of Domestic Law:** Legal vacuum regarding refugee issue makes a ground to follow the international conventions and norms in this regard as per the Supreme Court in **Vishakha versus State of Rajasthan case 1997**.
- **Constitutional Morality:** Following non-refoulement principle will uphold constitutional morality as **Article 51(c)** of constitution mandates that the state must strive to promote respect for international laws and treaty obligations.
- **Discriminatory Policy:** The refuge policy of the government is discriminatory as **Citizenship Amendment Act 2019** excludes persecuted rohingya muslims.

ARGUMENTS AGAINST POLICY OF NON-REFOULEMENT

- **Non-signatory:** India is not signatory to the Refugee convention, hence, India does not have a specific obligation on non-refoulement.
- **Internal security:** India's security policy is strictly against illegal migration as it can create law and order issues in the nation. **Example:** Rohingya settlements in Sri Nagar removed due to security concerns.
- **Resource constraints:** India already has a vast population under poverty to address. Migrants will pose an additional burden on national resources.
- **Cascading demand:** Providing refugee status to Rohingya will have a cascading demand from the other regions too. **Example:** Ahmadiyya Muslim population in Pakistan.

DIFFERENCE BETWEEN ASYLUM SEEKERS AND REFUGEES

- **Asylum Seeker:**
 - An asylum seeker is someone who has **fled their home country** and is seeking international

protection but has not yet been formally recognised as a refugee.

- They **apply for asylum in another country**, claiming they are at risk of persecution but their status is still under review.
- For example, Julian Assange took refuge in Ecuador's embassy and Sheikh Hasina took asylum in India after the upsurge in Bangladesh.

• Refugees:

- A refugee is someone who has been recognised under international law (**E.g., the 1951 Refugee Convention**) as being unable or unwilling to return to their home country due to a well-founded fear of persecution based on race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group.
- Refugees are **granted protection and legal rights** in the host country.

- **Status of Rohingya:** UNHCR recognises and registers the Rohingya as refugees.

The Rohingya issue is complex as it involves the angles like international law; internal security and governance; and ethical issues like humanity and protection to the aggrieved. India in order to address such challenges and issues should come up with a dedicated law and policy for refugees.

NEPAL CHINA SIGN BRI FRAMEWORK

#BILATERAL AGREEMENTS

PRIMARY
SOURCE THE HINDU

*The Prime Minister of Nepal is on an official visit to China. Nepal and China have recently signed the **execution framework** for the **Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)** in Beijing, indicating that Nepal will soon decide on projects for implementation.*

BELT AND ROAD INITIATIVE

- BRI (also referred to as the New Silk Road) is an **ambitious infrastructure project** (development and investment initiatives) launched by **China** in 2013.



KEY FEATURES OF BRI

• Two Components:

- Silk Road Economic Belt (overland network)
- Maritime Silk Road (sea-based trade routes)

• Global Reach:

- Originally devised to link **East Asia and Europe** through physical infrastructure.
- Has expanded to **Africa, Oceania, and Latin America**, significantly broadening China's economic and political influence.

• Infrastructure Projects:

- To create a vast network of railways, energy pipelines, highways, and streamlined border crossings, and Special Economic Zones.
- To promote technological adoptions like the 5G network powered by telecommunications giant Huawei.

• Geo-political Ambition:

- To expand Chinese global economic, political and technological influence.
- To expand the international use of Chinese currency (renminbi).

• Present status:

- Around 147 countries have signed or expressed interest in BRI, comprising two-thirds of global population and 40% of global GDP.
- **Except for India and Bhutan**, all South Asian countries are part of the BRI.

FOUR BRI CORRIDORS OF CONCERN TO INDIA

- BCIM Economic Corridor: Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar (1999)
- MSR: China Twenty-First Century Maritime Silk Road (2013)
- CPEC: China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (2015)

- Trans-Himalayan Economic Corridor (2017)

CHINA'S OBJECTIVE BEHIND BELT AND ROAD INITIATIVE

- **Geopolitical Influence:** To strengthen global ties, counter **U.S. influence**, and gain influence over participating countries.
- **Economic Expansion:** Develop new trade routes, export markets, boost domestic growth and strengthen Renminbi.
- **Infrastructure Development:** To enhance global infrastructure and link them with underdeveloped Chinese regions.
- **Energy Security:** Ensure stable energy supplies from **Central Asia and the Middle East** to fuel Chinese manufacturing engines.
- **Domestic Stability:** Promote growth in restive western provinces like Xinjiang.
- **Debt Diplomacy:** Use financing terms to maintain geopolitical control in the Asia Pacific and South Asian region.

ROADBLOCKS FOR BELT AND ROAD INITIATIVE

- **Debt Concerns:** Many countries face high debt burdens from BRI loans, often at near-market rates. **E.g., Sri Lanka.**
- **Transparency:** Opaque bidding processes and reliance on **Chinese firms** have led to inflated costs and project cancellations in the Middle East.
- **Political Backlash:** Countries like Malaysia and Pakistan have faced domestic criticism and budget issues linked to BRI projects.
- **Sovereignty:** Projects like CPEC pass through Pakistan Occupied Kashmir, which has stoked opposition from India.
- **Global Economic Instability:** COVID-19 and geopolitical conflicts like the Ukraine war have exacerbated repayment challenges.
- **Environmental Impact:** BRI funding still supports nonrenewable energy projects despite commitments to reduce coal investments causing environmental impact.

CHINA'S DEBT TRAP DIPLOMACY

#GEOPOLITICS

PRIMARY SOURCE | THE HINDU

Recently, the **International Debt Report 2024** was released by the **World Bank**. The report shows that **over 25% of the world's bilateral external debt** was owed to China in 2023. This has raised concerns over the debt trap diplomacy used by China.

DEBT TRAP DIPLOMACY

- It refers to a strategy where a **country extends excessive credit to another nation**, often leading the latter into a situation where it **cannot repay its debts**.
- This can result in the debtor nation being forced to **concede control over strategic assets or influence over its domestic and foreign policies** to the creditor nation.

DEBT TRAP DIPLOMACY LEADS TO

- **Loan Dependency:** Countries receiving loans become heavily indebted and vulnerable to economic pressures and **political influence**.
- **Asset Control:** Compelled to cede control over critical infrastructure or resources. **E.g., Sri Lanka** had to lease its **Hambantota Port** to a Chinese company for 99 years.
- **Strategic Influence:** Allows China to expand its geopolitical influence in regions such as Africa, South Asia, and Southeast Asia, at the expense of sovereignty.
- **Debt Restructuring:** In some cases, China has engaged in debt restructuring negotiations but has been criticised for **not being transparent** about the terms and conditions of these arrangements.

SOME EXAMPLES OF COUNTRIES FACING DEBT TRAP BURDEN

- **Sri Lanka's Hambantota Port** was financed by Chinese loans. After failing to repay the debt (\$ 8 Bn), the port is leased to a Chinese company for 99 years, granting China strategic control over a key maritime asset.
- **Pakistan:** Under China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), Pakistan has received substantial loans (Owes

\$22 Bn to China) for infrastructure development. The resulting debt could lead to increased Chinese influence over Pakistan's economy and political decisions.

- **Angola:** The second largest oil producer in sub-Saharan Africa, owed \$17 billion to China, which was about 58% of its external debt. Sub-Saharan nations owe over 50% of their external debt to China.

CONCERNS FOR INDIA

- **Growing Chinese influence:** Smaller nations like Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka are at a risk of coming under China's debt trap. It has increased China's influence to a considerable level, which is against India's desire to emerge as a **net security provider** in the region.
- **Challenge to Indo-Pacific Strategy:** China's debt trap policy will increase **China's assertiveness**, which directly challenges the open and peaceful Indo-Pacific region.
- **Against Sovereignty of India:** Chinese funded projects like **China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC)**, passing through Indian territory are a direct challenge to India's sovereignty.

WAY FORWARD

- **Build Back Better World Initiative:** The **G7** Countries proposed a '**Build Back Better World (B3W) initiative**' at the **47th G7 summit** to counter China's BRI.
- **Blue Dot Network:** Multi-stakeholder initiative formed by the **US, Japan, and Australia** to bring together governments, private sector and civil society to

promote **high-quality, trusted standards** for global infrastructure development.

- **G7 Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment:** It seeks to mobilise private sector investments in infrastructure projects across developing countries, focusing on quality and transparency.
- **Bilateral debt restructuring:** India is also helping neighbours like Sri Lanka, Maldives to restructure debt.

TURMOIL IN SYRIA: ASSAD REGIME ENDS

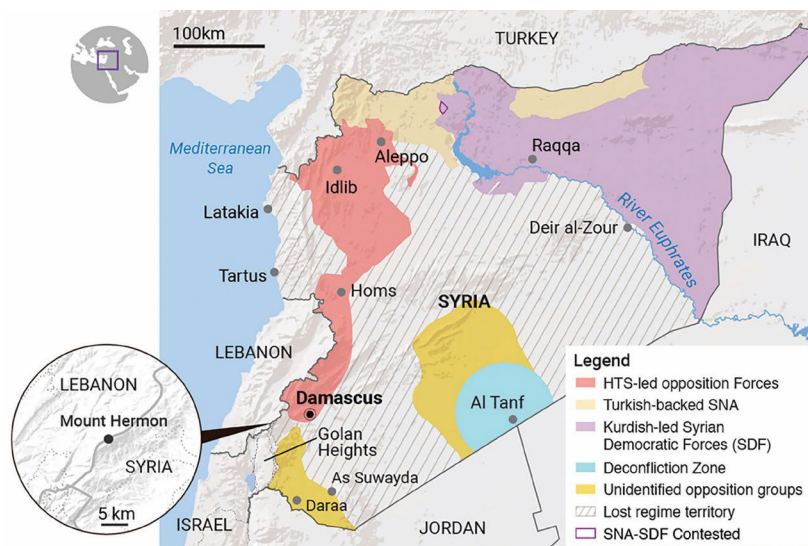
#GEOPOLITICS #WEST ASIA

PRIMARY SOURCE The Indian EXPRESS

Turkish backed rebels in Syria have overthrown President Bashar Al Assad, ending the Assad family's 5 decades rule in the country. The offensive is led by **Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS)** formerly known as **the Nusra Front** (It is a the Syrian branch of al-Qaeda).

WHAT ARE THE LIKELY OUTCOMES?

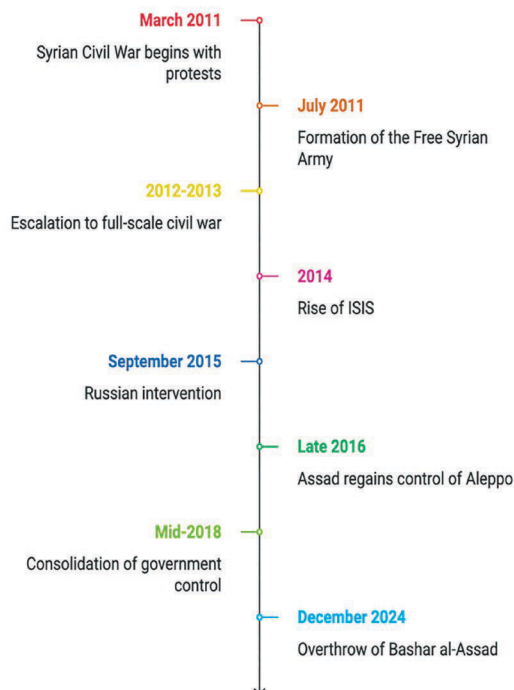
- It will **limit Iran's ability** to spread weapons to its allies like Hezbollah which have already been weakened by Israel.
- It could cost Russia its **Mediterranean naval base Tartus**.
- It also paves the way for millions of refugees scattered for more than a decade in camps across Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan **to finally return home**.



BRIEF HISTORY OF SYRIAN CIVIL WAR

- **Syrian Civil War** began in March 2011, rooted in widespread discontent with President **Bashar al-Assad's** regime, and was part of the broader **Arab Spring movement**.
- The conflict escalated from peaceful protests demanding democratic reforms to a full-scale civil war as government forces violently suppressed dissent.

Key Events in the Syrian Civil War

**KEY PHASES OF THE CONFLICT**

- **Initial Protests and Uprising (2011)**: Large-scale protests erupted across Syria, calling for political reform and the release of political prisoners. The government's brutal crackdown on demonstrators led to the formation of armed opposition groups, notably the **Free Syrian Army (FSA)**, in July 2011.
- **Escalation to Civil War (2012-2013)**: By mid-2012, the situation deteriorated into civil war, with significant territorial gains by rebel groups.
- **Rise of Extremist Groups (2014)**: The emergence of the **Islamic State (ISIS)** marked a new phase, as it captured large territories and declared a caliphate, complicating the conflict further. This prompted U.S. military intervention aimed at combating ISIS which continues till now.

- **Russian Intervention (2015)**: Russia intervened militarily to support Assad's regime, significantly altering the balance of power. Russian airstrikes targeted both ISIS and moderate rebel groups.
- **Government Consolidation (2016-2018)**: Assad regime gradually regained control over major cities and strategic areas, including Aleppo in late 2016 and parts of southern Syria by mid-2018.
- **Stalemate and Ongoing Conflict (2019-Present)**: Despite the regime's territorial gains, fighting continued in various regions, particularly in Idlib.
- **Current Situation (December 2024)**: Turkish backed rebels **HTS** have overthrown **Bashar Al Assad**, ending the family's 5 decades rule. He has flown to Russia seeking asylum.

HOUTHI REBELS BECOMING KEYSTONE OF IRAN'S 'AXIS OF RESISTANCE'

#WEST ASIA

PRIMARY
SOURCE The Indian
EXPRESS

*With the end of Bashar-al-Assad's regime in Syria, the Houthi rebels have gained importance in **Iran's axis of resistance** against the US and Israel.*

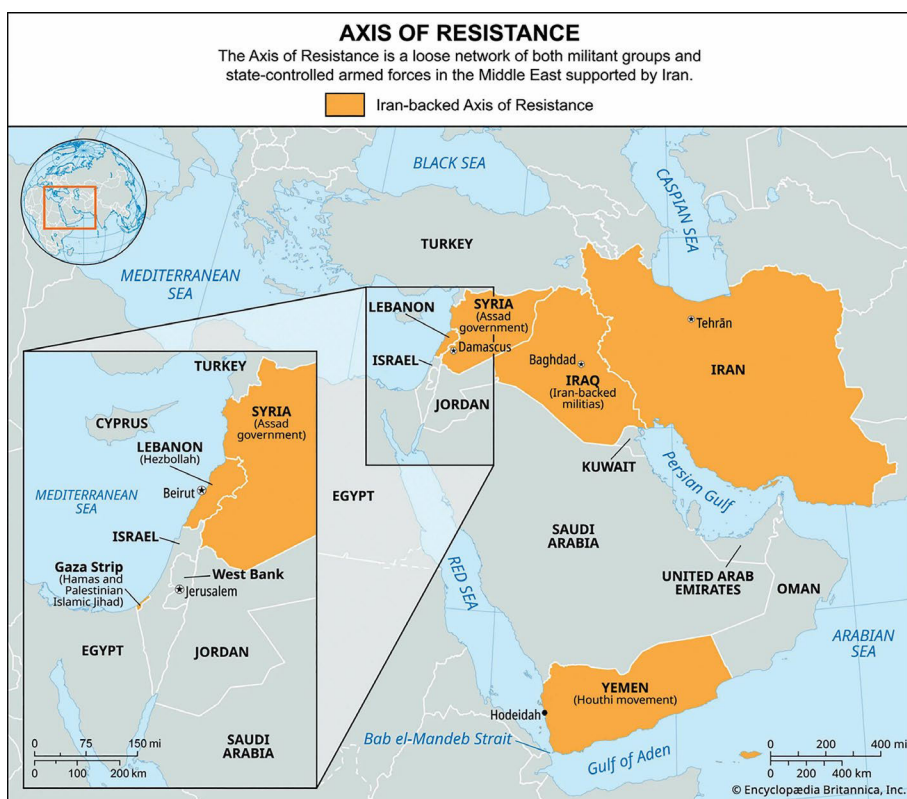
WHAT IS THE AXIS OF RESISTANCE?

- 'Axis of the Resistance' refers to the political and military alliances led by **Iran** and is composed of state and non-state actors in the Middle-East.
- The axis comprises **Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC)**, **Hezbollah** in Lebanon, the **Syrian armed forces**, **Hamas** and the **Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ)** in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, certain militias in **Iraq**, and Houthi forces in Yemen.

KEY GOALS OF AXIS OF RESISTANCE

- **Oppose Israel advances** in Gaza and help Palestine to gain control over the territory.
- **Against the US military presence** and its cultural influence in the middle east.

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS & SECURITY



- **Focus on the dominance of the Shia** sect of Islam, predominantly by creating a 'Shia crescent' including Lebanon, Iraq and Syria.
- **Focused against the Sunni-majority states** including Saudi Arabia, and UAE as they are aligned with the US.

MEANS AND MODES USED TO SUSTAIN IDEOLOGY

- **Military campaigns** as members are actively involved in several conflicts like Syrian civil war, Iraq fight against ISIS and Yemen's civil war.
- **Proxy warfare** by helping non-state actors like Hezbollah in Lebanon and Popular Mobilisation Forces (PMF).
- **Diplomatic alliance:** Axis is focused to counter USA by hand holding alliance with Russia and China for weapons and logistical support.

WHO ARE HOUTHIS REBELS?

Houthis, originally known as Ansar Allah (i.e. supporters of God) are **predominantly Shia Muslims** and a political military group of **Yemen**.

Role of Houthis in Axis of Resistance:

- **Opposing US allies:** Houthis attack Saudi Arabia from the Yemen border, as it is a US ally in the region.

- **Symbol of resistance:** Houthis continue terrorist attacks on Saudi Arabia and the US supported Yemen government to show resistance.
- **Block trade:** Location of Houthi is at a crucial choke point i.e., **Bal el-Mandeb strait** allows them to attack the vessels with short range rockets, leading to damage or rise in vessel insurance premium, disrupting trade.

IMPACT ON INDIA DUE TO THESE REGIONAL DYNAMICS

- **Impacting energy security:** Houthi attack on vessels can destabilise the Indian supply of crude oil via **Bab el-Mandeb** and **Red Sea**.
- **Expensive Maritime trade:** Indian vessels due to attack by Houthis either take the route of **Cape of Good Hope** or need to pay heavy premium on vessel insurances. Both make maritime trade expensive for India.
- **Safety of India Diaspora:** Any escalation in the situation leading to war like situation can risk the safety of 2.5 Million Indians in Saudi Arabia.
- **Geopolitical Challenge:** Violence and continuous proxy-war will demean India efforts to balance relations with the US and Iran.

- **Spill-over effect:** In case of escalation the tensions may spill to the **Horn of Africa** making a new challenge to balance relations with Djibouti and Somalia.

WAY FORWARD

- India should follow a pragmatic approach with a balance of Idealism containing values like humanity, peace and growth of the region.
- India needs to strengthen trade ties with the Middle East, continuously engage with Iran, ensure diaspora security, build a strong naval presence in the Indian Ocean and diversify the energy basket to sail over the tides of challenges in the region.

INDIA-UAE BILATERAL RELATIONS

#BILATERAL RELATIONS #WEST ASIA

PRIMARY SOURCE *The Indian EXPRESS*

*The United Arab Emirates (UAE) Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister **Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan** was on a three-day visit to **India from 11-13 December 2024**. The Foreign Minister attended the **15th India-UAE Joint Commission Meeting** and the **Fourth UAE-India Strategic Dialogue**.*

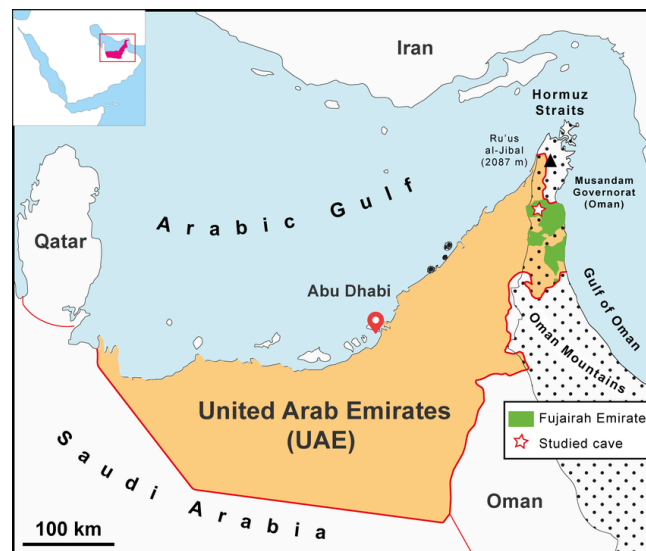
KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM THE VISIT

- Discussions to expand strategic partnership in several areas, including **defence, emerging technologies, nuclear energy, polar research, critical minerals and renewable energy**, among others.
- Commended strong cooperation between **two Central Banks**, particularly in the fintech sector, development of public digital infrastructure, including Central Bank Digital Currencies (CBDC).
- Both sides discussed **India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEEC)** -proposed route from India to Europe through the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Israel and Greece.

INDIA-UAE BILATERAL RELATIONSHIP

- **Diplomatic Relations:** India and UAE established diplomatic relations in 1972. The relationship gained momentum with Prime Minister Modi's visit in 2015, marking a new strategic partnership.
- **Economic Relations:**

- **India-UAE Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA)** entered into force in 2022.
- In 2022-23, trade reached **\$85 billion**, making the UAE India's **third-largest trading partner**. UAE is also India's second-largest export destination.



- **Investment:**
 - The UAE's estimated investment in India is around \$20-21 billion, with \$15.5 billion as FDI. The UAE has committed to invest \$75 billion in Indian infrastructure.
 - Notable investments include \$1 billion in India's National Infrastructure Investment Fund.
- **Trade Agreements:**
 - A significant MoU was signed for a **Local Currency Settlement System** (2023) to facilitate transactions using Indian Rupees and UAE Dirhams.
 - **India-UAE Bilateral Investment Treaty** entered into force in 2024.
- **Energy security:**
 - 2024: India and UAE have inked four major pacts that will facilitate crude oil storage, long-term supply of LNG and cooperation in the civil nuclear energy sector.
- **Multilateral Cooperation:**
 - Both nations cooperate at platforms like the **UN, BRICS, I2U2 (India-Israel-UAE-USA)**, and the **UAE-France-India (UFI) Trilateral**.
 - UAE was a guest country at the G20 Summit hosted by India.
- **Diaspora and Remittances:**

- Indian diaspora is the largest ethnic group in the UAE (**around 3.5 million**), constituting about **35% of the population**.
- The community has transitioned from predominantly **blue-collar workers to a mix of professionals and businesspeople**.
- The Indian community contributes significantly to **remittances**, accounting for **18% of total remittances to India**.
- Cultural Relations:**
 - Indian culture is prominent in the UAE, with Indian cinema and festivals celebrated widely.
 - Initiatives like yoga events and cultural exchanges have further strengthened ties.
 - BAPS Mandir built in Abu Dhabi, inaugurated in 2024, stands as the largest temple in West Asia.
- Education Initiatives:** Over 100 Indian schools operate in the UAE. An **IIT Delhi campus in Abu Dhabi** has also become operational.
- Military cooperation:**
 - Joint military exercises such as **Desert Cyclone**.
 - Establishment of a Defence Partnership Forum.
 - Collaboration on counter-terrorism efforts and maritime security initiatives.

WAY FORWARD: Issues like reforming the Kafala system for welfare of migrants, addressing the spillover of the recent Syrian crisis in the region, Chinese influence and minimisation of non-trade barriers need to be addressed to further deepen the relationship.

INDIA-KUWAIT RELATIONS

#BILATERAL RELATIONS

PRIMARY
SOURCE THE HINDU

The Indian Prime Minister recently concluded a two day visit to Kuwait. The two nations agreed to elevate their bilateral relationship to a "Strategic Partnership" to enhance cooperation across various sectors viz. political, trade, defence, security, and cultural areas.

KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM THE VISIT

- Trade relations:** Both sides emphasised the importance of trade and discussed enhancing bilateral

trade and investment opportunities in various sectors like infrastructure and food parks.

- Energy cooperation:** Discussions included transforming energy cooperation into a comprehensive partnership. Kuwait's membership in the International Solar Alliance was welcomed as a step towards sustainable energy collaboration.



- Defence cooperation:** An MoU was signed to strengthen defense ties through joint exercises, training, and development of defence technology.
- Counter-terrorism:** Both countries condemned terrorism and agreed to enhance cooperation in counter-terrorism efforts.
- Health:** The visit reinforced health cooperation, including Indian pharmaceutical manufacturing in Kuwait.
- Order of Mubarak Al Kabeer':** The Amir conferred upon the Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi the highest award of Kuwait, **'The Order of Mubarak Al Kabeer'**.

INDIA-KUWAIT RELATIONS

- Historical relations:**
 - Kuwait and India have enjoyed cordial relations since the past. Kuwait and India are the members of **Non-aligned Movement (NAM)**.
 - Until 1961, the Indian currency note – the Rupee was a **legal tender** in Kuwait.
- Extended Neighborhood:** India considers the Kuwait as part of its 'extended neighborhood'.

- India adopted the **Look West Policy** in 2005 to deepen cooperation with West Asian countries and meet India's national interests in the region.

Significance of Kuwait to India:

- Location:** Its geopolitical location in the **Persian Gulf** and its image as a **neutral player** in the region make it significant to India.
- Economic Security:** Kuwait has a **\$924 billion sovereign wealth fund** and is also a founding member of blocks like OPEC and GCC.
- Gulf Cooperation Council:** India intends to sign a Free Trade Agreement with GCC. Kuwait can play a significant role in India's engagement with GCC.
- Energy Security:**
 - Kuwait supplies about **3% of India's crude oil requirements**.
 - Both nations plan to transform energy ties to a **comprehensive partnership**, including collaborations in oil, gas, and renewable energy.
 - Kuwait has expressed interest in India's **Strategic Petroleum Reserve Programme**.
- Diaspora:** There is a strong 1 million Indian diaspora contributing to "talent, tech and tradition" in Kuwait.



GULF COOPERATION COUNCIL (GCC)

- GCC is a politico-economic alliance of 6 countries in Arabian Peninsula- **Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates**.
- Headquarters:** Riyadh.

INDIA-SAUDI ARABIA TO EXPLORE JOINT VENTURES IN DEFENCE SECTOR

#BILATERAL RELATIONS

PRIMARY SOURCE THE HINDU

Defence-Industrial Cooperation has become a major focus area between India and Saudi Arabia, as the countries are exploring joint ventures and collaborations.

ASPECTS OF DEFENCE COOPERATION

- India and Saudi Arabia aim to enhance defence ties through **technology transfer, joint ventures, and exchange of expertise**.
- The nations are focused on **localising defence production**.
 - Saudi's Vision 2030 aims to localise 50% of its defence spending.
 - India has opened its defence sector to Saudi investments, advocating the '**invest, trade, localise**' approach.
- India's defence exports to Saudi Arabia:**
 - Saudi Arabia has procured the **155mm Advanced Towed Artillery Gun System (ATAGS)** from Bharat Forge. It has evaluated additional artillery systems from Indian manufacturers.
 - Saudi Arabia has recently signed a **\$250 million ammunition contract** with India's Munitions India Limited. Saudi companies are keen on partnerships in shipbuilding, electronics, AI, and cybersecurity.



- Joint Exercises:**

- **Sada Tanseeq:** Inaugural joint military exercise held in Rajasthan in 2024.
- **Al Mohed Al Hindi:** Bilateral Naval exercise commenced in 2022.
- **Tarang Shakti:** Saudi participated as an observer in India's largest air exercise.

IMPORTANCE OF SAUDI ARABIA TO INDIA

- **Energy Security:**

- Saudi Arabia is India's **second largest supplier of crude oil** (~18% of the total import). India also sources ~32% of its LPG requirements from Saudi Arabia.
- Saudi Arabian oil major ARAMCO has decided to partner in the Ratnagiri Refinery and Petro-Chemical Project in Maharashtra, a Joint Venture of US\$ 44 billion billed as the world's biggest.

- **Bilateral Trade & Investment:**

- Total bilateral trade is around \$43.3 billion, in 2023-24. India is the 4th largest trading partner of Saudi Arabia.
- Saudi Arabia had expressed intent to invest about \$100 billion in India.
- Saudi Arabia identified India as one of the Kingdom's **8 Strategic Partner Countries** under '**Vision 2030**' to reduce Saudi Arabia's dependence on oil and diversify its economy.

- **Socio-cultural Relations:**

- Of the 11 million Indians working in West Asia, 2.65 million are in Saudi Arabia.
- Saudi Arabia is a source of foreign remittances (up to \$11 billion annually).
- India has the world's 3rd largest Muslim population that's why Saudi [have Islam's holiest sites Mecca & Medina] becomes important in India's strategic calculus.

- **Strategic and Security Cooperation:**

- **Riyadh Declaration** (2010) has raised the level of partnership to strategic partnership which will help to tackle terrorism and radicalization.
- Both cooperate on ensuring the **security and safety of waterways** in the Indian Ocean region and the Gulf region.

- **Global Cooperation:**

- India and Saudi Arabia have been working together within the G20 to reduce inequality and promote sustainable development.
- Both sides cooperate in climate change, green energy and disaster management.

WHAT MANIPUR NEEDS?

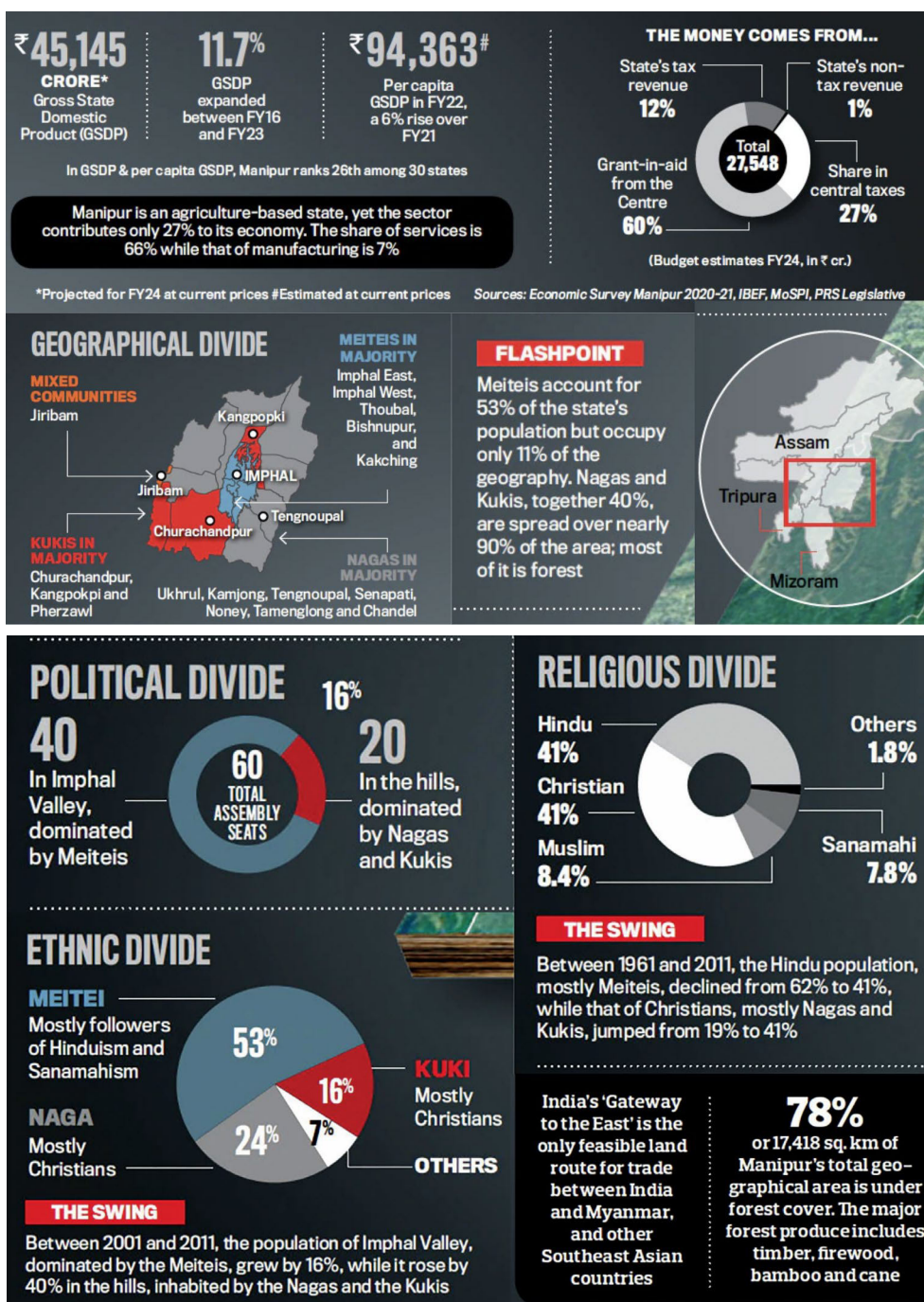
#INTERNAL SECURITY

PRIMARY
SOURCE THE HINDU

On **May 3, 2023**, ethnic violence erupted in Manipur between the **Meiteis**, a majority that lives in the Imphal Valley, and the **Kuki-Zo tribals**, who inhabit the surrounding Hills. So far, more than 250 people have lost their lives and more than 60,000 people are displaced.

FACTORS BEHIND THE RIOTS IN MANIPUR

- **Neglect of community rights:** Inability of the state government to acknowledge and respect the territorial rights and distinct identities of the various tribal communities residing in the state.
- **Integrationist policies:** Government's push for aggressive integration, particularly by attempting to dilute tribal land rights in Imphal valley regions, created friction between the Meitei and tribal communities.
- **High Court decision:** The situation escalated in April 2023 when the Manipur High Court directed a swift recommendation for granting Scheduled Tribe (ST) status to the Meiteis. This decision heightened tribal anxieties, culminating in widespread protests in May 2023.
- **Meitis political domination:**
 - Regardless of which party comes to power, the Manipur government has always been dominated by plainsmen Meiteis, who account for about 53% of the state's population and live mostly in irregular oval-shaped Imphal Valley.
 - This domination has often been viewed through the prism of suspicion by tribals -- mostly Nagas and Kukis, who make up 40% of Manipur's population and live for the most part in the hills surrounding the valley.



OUTCOMES OF THE RIOTS IN MANIPUR

- **Widespread displacement:** Thousands of people, including both Meitei and tribal communities, were forced to flee their homes, leading to internal displacement and the establishment of relief camps.
- **Deepened ethnic divides:** The riots intensified long-standing ethnic tensions, further polarizing communities and straining inter-group relations.
- **Political repercussions:** The riots have prompted reviewing policies related to tribal rights and state governance.
- **Economy of State:** The violence disrupted economic activities, trade, and the overall development of the region.
- **Erosion of trust in governance:** Public confidence in the state's ability to manage communal issues and

maintain law and order has been significantly undermined.

WAY FORWARD

- **Declare President rule:** President's Rule should be declared in the state and select a governor, a dynamic police or army officer of integrity, who has experience in counter-insurgency, preferably someone who has served in the northeast.
- **Revamp Administration:** The administration would need to be completely revamped. There are senior officers who are more concerned about saving their skin rather than dealing fearlessly with situations which present formidable hazards. They will have to be replaced.
- **Integrity of state should be upheld:** It should be made clear to all and sundry that there would be no compromise on the integrity of Manipur.
- **Strict approach towards violent groups:** Those indulging in or inciting violence; those trying to give a religious colour to the conflict and have been responsible for vandalizing temples or churches; and those involved in drug trafficking.
- **Disarming and peace building:** There should be a well-organised attempt to disarm people of the unlicensed and prohibited bore weapons they may have acquired from any source. A time limit should be given and those found holding such weapons after the expiry of that time limit should be booked under the **National Security Act**.
- **Peace committees** should be formed in every district comprising representatives of every section/group/tribe. There should be a peace committee at the state level also comprising senior leaders of different sections/groups/tribes.
 - **Building Trust and Reconciliation:** Addressing historical grievances, fostering social harmony, and promoting reconciliation among communities are crucial for long-term stability.

Conclusion: The primary concern should no doubt be to put down violence, quickly followed or accompanied by an effort to address the grievances. Find a middle ground, reconcile the differences, form peace committees at different levels, and take such political initiatives which convince the people of the government's sincerity and

inspire confidence. There should be a WHAM approach — **winning hearts and minds**.

WHAT IS THE H-1B VISA?

#EMPLOYMENT #DIASPORA

PRIMARY
SOURCE *The Indian
EXPRESS*

*The US President elect Donald Trump's supporters are locked in a public row about skilled immigration and H-1B visa. H-1B Visa has been the highly **desired pathway for jobseekers** including Indians to migrate to the US.*

H-1B VISA

- The **H-1B** is a Visa in the **United States** that **allows the US employers to employ high skilled foreign workers** in specialised occupations. The programme was started in **1990**.
- **Criterion:** Specialty Occupation refers to a job that requires a specific set of specialised skills and educational qualifications.
 - **Educational Requirement:** At least a Bachelor's degree or higher in a specific field of study.
 - **Specialised Knowledge:** Expertise in a particular field like- IT specialists, engineers, scientists, healthcare professionals etc.
 - **Complex and specialised duties** associated with the position.

DURATION AND CAP

- H-1B status is **initially granted for three years** but can be **extended to another three years** (maximum of 6 years).
- After 6 years the visa holder has to either leave the US for a period of at least 12 months before returning or apply for and receive permanent residence that is a **green card**.
- There is **no capping** on the number of H1-B Visas that an individual can have in his/her lifetime.
- Currently, the annual numerical limit is **85,000** for H-1B visas (65,000 new status visas and extra 20,000 visas available to those with a Master's degree or higher from the US universities.)

DEBATE OVER H-1B VISAS:

- **Immigration** is one of the most polarising political issues in the US. Much of the election time anti-

immigration rhetoric focused on **low skilled labour migration**.

- Critics of the H-1B program claim that this program has been **misused by tech corporations** to staff their low to mid-level workforce for much less pay than what Americans would demand.
- Such immigration **depresses wages** and takes away jobs that would have otherwise gone to the American working class.
- **Proponents of H-1B visa argue** that this programme is essential for bridging the skill gaps in the USA and wages are market driven. Since, China and India boast the **highest number of STEM graduates** (more than 6 million combined) in the World. When compared to the number of STEM graduates in the US (nearly 8 lakh), they become critical and vital for the economy.

SILIGURI CORRIDOR

#LOCATIONS #INTERNAL SECURITY

PRIMARY SOURCE THE HINDU

SILIGURI CORRIDOR

- Siliguri Corridor (Chicken's Neck) is a **narrow strip of land** in **West Bengal** that connects the **North-eastern States** to the rest of the country.
- The area has a width of about **20 km** and **length of 60 km** and is not far away from China.



IMPORTANCE

- **Connectivity:** Only **land route** connecting the eight northeastern states of India—Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim, and Tripura—to the Indian mainland. All land transportation between these states and the rest of India passes through this corridor.
- **Economic Role:** Key route to facilitate trade and commerce not only within India but also with neighbouring countries like **Nepal and Bhutan**.
- **Military Significance:** Crucial for national security as it allows for the movement of military personnel and

supplies to sensitive areas near international borders with **China and Bangladesh**.

PROTECTED AREA PERMIT REINSTATED IN MYANMAR BORDERING STATES

#INNER LINE PERMIT #INTERNAL SECURITY

PRIMARY SOURCE The Indian EXPRESS

*Protected Area Permit (PAP) has been reinstated in the Myanmar-bordering states of India, namely, Manipur, Mizoram and Nagaland, following **security concerns**, particularly influx of illegal migrants from neighbouring countries.*

PROTECTED AREA PERMIT SYSTEM

- **Protected Area Permit** is a **special permit** required by **foreign nationals** to visit certain areas in India **deemed sensitive** due to their proximity to international borders.
- **Protected Areas:**
 - Whole of Arunachal Pradesh
 - Whole of Manipur
 - Whole of Mizoram
 - Whole of Nagaland
 - Whole of Sikkim (partly in Protected Area and partly in Restricted Area)
 - Parts of Himachal Pradesh
 - Parts of Uttarakhand
 - Parts of Jammu & Kashmir
 - Parts of Rajasthan
- A **foreign national is not normally allowed to visit** a Protected Area unless the government is satisfied that there are **extraordinary reasons** to justify such a visit.

RELATED REGULATIONS

1. Foreigners (Protected Areas) Order, 1958:

- All areas falling between the **Inner line** and the **International Border of the State** have been declared as **Protected Areas**.
- Under the PAP system, **foreigners must obtain permits** to visit these states, as mandated by the **Foreigners (Protected Areas) Order, of 1958**.

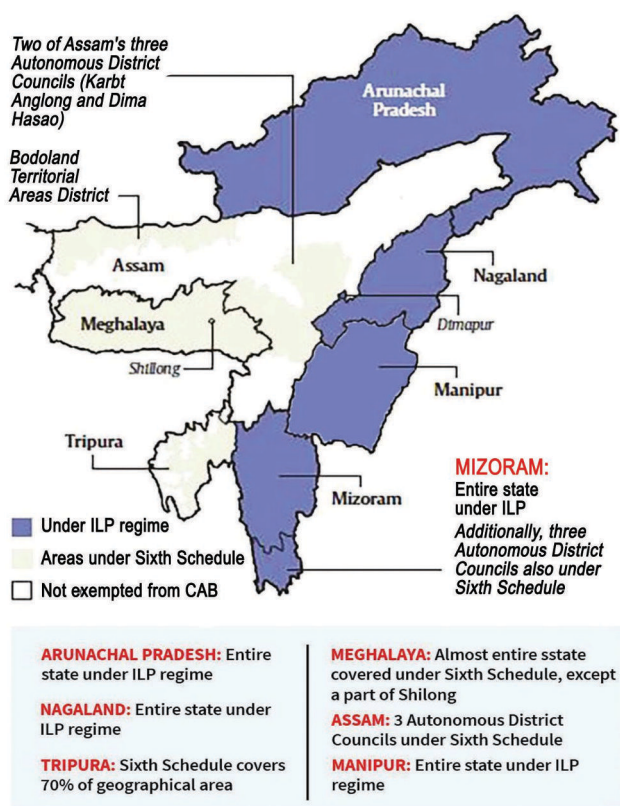
2. Foreigners (Restricted Areas) Order, 1963:

- It specifies certain regions as **restricted areas** (such as Andaman & Nicobar Islands and parts of Sikkim), which require a Restricted Area Permit for foreign nationals.

3. Inner Line Permit (ILP):

- It is a **travel document** that must be availed by **Indian Citizens** (domestic tourists) to visit these Protected and Restricted Areas of the ILP states, for a limited period.
- ILP States:** Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Mizoram and Manipur.

Note: ILP is required by Indian citizens, whereas PAP is required by foreign nationals for entry into these designated areas.

**CASE OF MANIPUR, MIZORAM AND NAGALAND**

- In 2010, PAP had been relaxed for Manipur, Mizoram and Nagaland **for boosting tourism**. However, even then certain restrictions continued. For instance, citizens and foreign nationals of **Afghanistan, China and Pakistan** origins still needed **prior approval** from the Ministry of Home Affairs for entry into these states.
- The current scenario of **influx of illegal immigrants from bordering countries** necessitated the reimposition of Protected Area Permit.

HOW CAN FOREIGN NATIONALS VISIT PROTECTED AREAS?

- Every foreigner, except a citizen of Bhutan, who desires to enter and stay in a Protected Area, is **required to obtain a special permit** from a **competent authority** delegated with powers to issue such a special permit to a foreigner, on application.

INDIA-MYANMAR BORDER FREE MOVEMENT REGIME

#BILATERAL RELATIONS

PRIMARY SOURCE THE HINDU

In February 2024, the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) announced its decision to **scrap the Free Movement Regime (FMR)** between India and Myanmar. However, the formal orders on ending FMR are still awaited.

BACKGROUND

- India and Myanmar share a **largely unfenced 1,643 km** border, which goes through the states of Manipur, Mizoram, Assam, Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh.
- February 2024:**
 - MHA announced the scrapping of FMR between India and Myanmar to **ensure internal security** and **maintain the demographic structure** of India's northeastern States.
 - MHA also announced that a **fence will be constructed** along the entire border.

- However, these were verbal announcements and formal orders are still awaited.
- **December 2024:** MHA has released **new guidelines** to introduce stricter regulations, such as reducing the range of free movement from the earlier **16 km** to the **present 10 km**.

FREE MOVEMENT REGIME

- FMR along the India-Myanmar border came into existence in **1968**. It is shaped by the **deep ethnic and familial connections** between residents of India and Myanmar's Chin state.
 - **Mizo, Kuki, and Chins**, collectively known as **Zo people** (on either side of the border) share a **common ancestry and robust ethnic ties**.
 - India-Myanmar border was demarcated by the British in **1826**, which resulted in **dispersion of Zo people** across international boundaries.
- Earlier, the **territorial limit** of free movement along the borders was **40 km**, which was **reduced to 16 km** in 2004, and additional regulations were enforced in 2016.
- Now, the MHA has brought in **fresh protocol** to regulate the **movement of people living within 10 kilometres** on either side of the largely unfenced international border.

CRIMINAL TRACKING NETWORK AND SYSTEMS

#GOVERNANCE

PRIMARY SOURCE THE HINDU

Nearly 15 years after **Criminal Tracking Network and Systems (CCTNS)** was launched, all 17,130 police stations in the country have been linked through the CCTNS.

CRIMINAL TRACKING NETWORK AND SYSTEMS

- CCTNS is a **centralised online platform** to file First Information Reports



(FIRs), chargesheets, and investigation reports.

- This online database **can be accessed by law enforcement authorities** across the country.

BACKGROUND

- It was conceptualised by the **Ministry of Home Affairs** and has been implemented as a **Mission Mode Project since 2009**.
- **Rationale:** A comprehensive and integrated system for **enhancing efficiency and effectiveness of** policing at the police station level throughout India.
- **National Crime Record Bureau (NCRB)** is the nodal agency and is entrusted with the responsibility for monitoring, coordinating and implementing the CCTNS project.

UTILITY OF CCTNS

- Creating a **citizen friendly and transparent Police functioning** by automating functioning of Police Stations such as Law and Order, Traffic Management etc.
- Providing tools, technology and information to the Investigating Officers to **facilitate effective and efficient investigation** of crime and detection of criminals.
- **Facilitate Interaction and sharing of Information** among various police agencies and jurisdictions.
- Keep track of the **progress of cases**, including in Courts. Reduce manual and redundant Records keeping.

INDIRA GANDHI PEACE PRIZE 2024

#AWARDS

PRIMARY SOURCE THE HINDU

Former **Chilean President** and prominent **human rights voice Michelle Bachelet** has been conferred with the Indira Gandhi Prize for Peace, Disarmament and Development for 2024.



ABOUT MICHELLE BACHELET

- She is the **founding director of UN Women (2010-2013)**, has served as UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (2018-2022).
- She has spoken strongly for **gender equality** and the rights of the **most vulnerable sections of the population** at home and across the world.
- She served as the President of Chile from 2006-2010 and 2014-2018. During her tenure, she implemented education and tax reforms, and a free trade agreement was signed between India and Chile.

ABOUT INDIRA GANDHI PEACE PRIZE

- Established in 1986 and awarded by the **Indira Gandhi Memorial Trust**.
- It includes a **cash award of Rs 25 lakh and a citation**.
- The Prize is **awarded annually to a person or organisation without any distinction of nationality, race or religion**, in recognition of creative efforts towards:
 - Promoting international peace and disarmament, racial equality, and goodwill and harmony among nations.
 - Securing economic co-operation and promoting a new international economic order.
 - Accelerating the all-round advancement of developing nations.
 - Ensuring that discoveries of science and modern knowledge are used for the larger good of the human race.
 - Enlarging scope of freedom and enriching the human spirit.

PRACTICE QUESTIONS

MCQS

Q1. Consider the following statements with reference to the Siliguri Corridor:

1. The Siliguri Corridor connects the northeastern states of India with the rest of the country.
2. At its narrowest point, the corridor passes between Nepal and Bhutan.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- | | |
|------------------|---------------------|
| (a) 1 only | (b) 2 only |
| (c) Both 1 and 2 | (d) Neither 1 nor 2 |

Q2. Which of the following is not a member of the Gulf Cooperation Council?

- | | |
|----------|------------------|
| (a) Iran | (b) Saudi Arabia |
| (c) Oman | (d) Kuwait |

Q3. Recently 'Axis of Resistance' was in the news. Which countries are part of this alliance?

- | | |
|---------|---------|
| 1. Iran | 2. ISIS |
|---------|---------|

- | | |
|--------------|------------------|
| 3. Hezbollah | 4. Houthi rebels |
| 5. Pakistan | 6. Saudi Arabia |

Choose the correct option:

- | | |
|---------------|----------------------|
| (a) Only two | (b) Only three |
| (c) Only four | (d) All of the above |

Q4. With Reference to Criminal Tracking Network and Systems (CCTNS), consider the following statements

1. It is a centralised repository of crime related data exclusively developed for the Intelligence bureau and CBI.
2. National Crime Record Bureau (NCRB) is the nodal agency entrusted with the responsibility for monitoring the project.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- | | |
|------------------|---------------------|
| (a) 1 only | (b) 2 only |
| (c) Both 1 and 2 | (d) Neither 1 nor 2 |

Q5. With reference to H-1B visas programme; consider the following statements:

1. This programme is aimed at enabling students from around the world to get admissions in the premier educational institutions of EU and North America.

2. Once issued this visa stands valid for 10 years at a stretch and cannot be renewed beyond that.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

- (a) 1 only (b) 2 only
(c) Both 1 and 2 (d) Neither 1 nor 2

DESCRIPTIVE QUESTIONS

- Q1.** 'Stable relations with China are vital to India's energy, economic and strategic interests'. In the light of the statement, discuss the significance of resolving disputes with China.
- Q2.** The fall of Basar-al-Assad in Syria has opened new opportunities for stabilising the Middle-East region. Explain the statement in light of the Axis of Alliance of Iran in the region.

Answers: 1-a, 2-a, 3-b, 4-b, 5-d

SOCIETY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

GS PAPER I & GS PAPER II (MAIN)

HOW TO NAVIGATE DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGES IN INDIA?

#POPULATION ISSUES

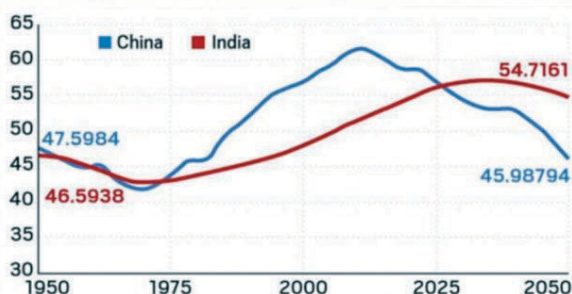
PRIMARY
SOURCE The Indian
EXPRESS

Population issues are under discussion again with reports suggesting the possibility of the Census being carried out in 2025 and the delimitation exercise for Parliamentary seats is likely to be conducted thereafter.

TRENDS OF DEMOGRAPHIC TRANSITION IN INDIA

- **Increased Share of Working Age Population:** India has been witnessing a growing proportion of its population in the working-age group, which presents an opportunity for economic growth.
- **Variation among the states:** States like Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Telangana, Kerala and Delhi achieved low TFR levels, whereas states like UP, Bihar, MP, Rajasthan are still experiencing TFR levels way above the replacement level (2.1).

Percentage Share of Population aged 20-59



- **Changing age composition:** With low TFR levels and increased longevity, the country is expected to witness a declining share of young population (<15 years) and increasing share of elderly population (>60 years) over the next two decades.

DELAYED CENSUS AND ITS IMPACTS

- **Decennial census** provides **authentic data on demography**, economic activity, literacy and education, housing and household amenities, urbanisation, fertility and mortality, scheduled castes and scheduled tribes, language, religion, migration, disability and many other socio-cultural and demographic data for **policy making purpose to Central and the State Governments**.
- However, in 2020, the census was postponed indefinitely due to the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic. Till then the government extended the timeline of census operations repeatedly.

IMPACT OF DELAYED CENSUS

- **Delimitation:** Unavailability of latest Census data halts the process of delimitation of constituencies and determining the quantum of reservation for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.
- **Sample surveys:** Census data are critical for other sample surveys conducted in the country as they use the Census data as a 'frame' or list from which a representative sample of the population is selected for surveys. For the latest edition of the National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5) released last year, it was the 2011 data that served as the sampling frame.
- **Financial devolution:** "Population" and "Demographic performance" are two criteria for financial devolution to states by the centre as suggested by the finance commission. But outdated census data impacts optimal financial devolution to states.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- **Investing in Human Capital:** To harness the demographic dividend, it is crucial to invest in health, education, and skill development. This will enhance the productivity of the workforce and ensure sustainable economic growth.
- **Addressing the Increasing Share of the Elderly Population:**

- As the old age population grows, it is essential to establish a robust social security net that includes pensions, provident funds, and insurance to provide financial stability.
- Develop geriatrics care infrastructure, including care homes and assisted living devices, to support the elderly population effectively.
- Consider increasing the retirement age to align with changing demographics and ensure a sustainable workforce.
- **Facilitating Inter-State Migration:** With variations in Total Fertility Rate (TFR) levels among states, mass inter-state migration may occur. To accommodate this, the government should:
 - Invest in mass transport infrastructure to facilitate easy movement.
 - Implement the three-language formula to ease integration.
 - Remove local quotas on jobs to promote equitable access to employment opportunities.
- **Delimitation of Constituencies:** Adjusting the delimitation of constituencies and changing representation in Parliament according to shifting demographics will ensure fair representation and address the needs of diverse populations.
- **Adoption of Artificial Intelligence (AI):** Utilizing AI can help address labor shortages in certain states by automating processes and improving efficiency, thus complementing the existing workforce.
- **Consolidation of Primary Schools:** In light of the declining share of the young population, consolidating or merging primary schools can enhance their viability.

By implementing these policies, the government can effectively navigate demographic changes, promote economic stability, and ensure that all citizens benefit from the evolving socio-economic landscape.

RISING NON- COMMUNICABLE DISEASE BURDEN

#HEALTH

PRIMARY
SOURCE THE HINDU

Non-Communicable Diseases are rapidly rising in India, particularly in the Urban areas of the country. Globalisation, industrialisation, and rapid urbanisation are major factors contributing to their rise.

NON-COMMUNICABLE DISEASES

- **NCDs:** Group of **chronic diseases** that are not caused by infectious agents and typically have a long development period.
- **Diseases:** Include a **range of conditions** such as cardiovascular diseases, cancer, diabetes, chronic respiratory diseases, and mental health disorders.
- **Risk factors:** Unhealthy diets, physical inactivity, tobacco use, harmful use of alcohol, pollution and environmental factors.
- **According to the World Health Organisation,** NCDs account for **71% of all deaths globally**, with cardiovascular diseases being the leading cause. 66% of total deaths in India in 2019 were due to NCDs.

URBANISATION AND INCREASING BURDEN OF NCDs

- **Economic Structure:** Urban economies are primarily service-oriented, which reduces the need for manual labor compared to agrarian rural economies. This contributes to the sedentary lifestyle and associated risk of NCDs.
- **Changing Dietary Patterns:** Urban areas often see increased consumption of processed foods, unhealthy fats, and sugars, leading to poor nutrition which are directly related to rising incidence of NCDs.
- **Environmental Factors:** Pollution and the Urban Heat Island effect exacerbate health risks associated with NCDs.
- **Lifestyle Choices:** Higher prevalence of alcohol consumption and smoking in urban settings increases the risk of developing NCDs.
- **Family Structure Changes:** Shift towards nuclear families in urban areas can lead to mental health issues due to lack of emotional support from extended family members.

INITIATIVES TAKEN BY GOVERNMENT

- **National Programme for Prevention and Control of Cancer, Diabetes, Cardiovascular Diseases and Stroke:** Implemented since 2010 to prevent and control major NCDs (Hypertension, Diabetes, Cardiovascular disease, Cancer, Stroke, Chronic kidney

disease, COPD/ Asthma, Non-Alcoholic Fatty Liver Disease, etc).

- **National Action Plan:** India has adopted the **National Action Plan** with specific national targets and indicators aimed at **reducing** the number of global premature deaths from NCDs by **25% by 2025**.
 - The plan was based on the **WHO's Global Action Plan for the Prevention and Control of NCDs**.
 - UN SDG (Target 3.4) aims to reduce premature mortality from NCDs by one-third by 2030, globally.
- **Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana** includes coverage for treatment of NCDs, to over 10 crore families, including cancer.
- **Fit India Movement and promotion of Yoga** to encourage people to remain healthy and fit by including physical activities and sports in their lifestyle.
- **National Mental Health Programme** and **National Tele Mental Health Programme** to improve access to quality mental health counselling and care services in the country.

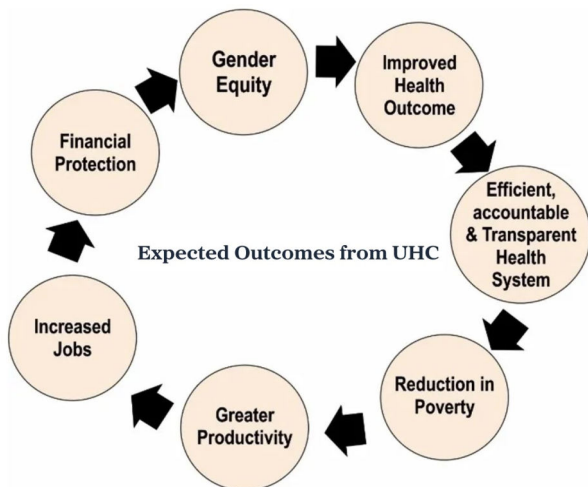
UNIVERSAL HEALTH COVERAGE

#HEALTH

PRIMARY SOURCE: THE HINDU

Universal Health Coverage (UHC) is essential for ensuring that all individuals in India can access quality healthcare without facing financial hardship. Public spending on health plays a crucial role in achieving this goal.

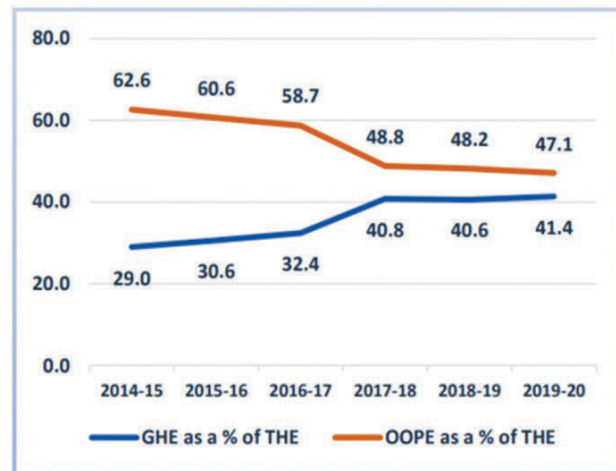
UNIVERSAL HEALTH COVERAGE



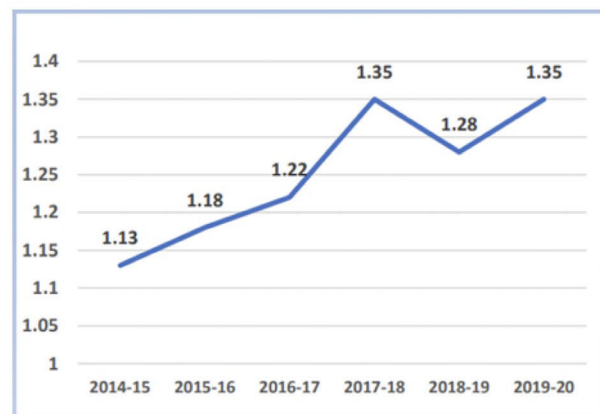
- **Health** is a state of complete physical, mental, and social wellbeing, and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.
- UHC covers **three key elements** — access, quality, and financial protection.
- India is committed to **achieving UHC for all by 2030**, which is fundamental to achieve other Sustainable Development Goals.

EXTENT OF PUBLIC SPENDING ON HEALTH IN INDIA

- **Total Health Expenditure (THE)** for India is estimated to be around **3.3% of GDP** and ₹4,863 per capita.
- **Share of Out-of-Pocket Expenditure (OOPE)** in Total Health Expenditure declined from 62.6% in 2014-15 to 47.1% in 2019-20.
- **Share of Government Health Expenditure in Total Health Expenditure** increases from 29% (2014-15) to 41.4% (2019-20).
- **Government Health Expenditure's share** in the country's total GDP increases from 1.13% (2014-15) to **1.35%** (2019-20).



Government Health Expenditure and Out-of-Pocket Expenditure as % of Total Health Expenditure (%)



Government Health Expenditure as % of GDP

Despite the significant increase in government expenditure on health, it is still way below the **target of National Health Policy (2017) - 2.5% of GDP.**

NEED FOR GOVERNMENT HEALTH EXPENDITURE

- **Preventive Healthcare:** Unlike private health expenditure, public spending invests heavily on preventive health care services like Immunisation and Nutrition, which ultimately reduces the expenditure burden on curative healthcare.
- **Reduce Catastrophic Expenditure:** In India, where workforce is predominantly concentrated in the informal sector and devoid of social security net, there is more probability for incidence of catastrophic health expenditure on its population. Hence, significant public spending on health is necessary to reduce catastrophic health expenditure and incidence of poverty as a result of it.
- **Limitations of Private Participation:**
 - **Affordability:** Since private institutions require heavy investment in infrastructure, advanced equipment and quality professionals, health services are not affordable. This causes heavy OOP by households, especially in secondary & tertiary care.
 - **Issues in Private insurance:** Adverse selection (asymmetric information between buyer and insurer) and moral hazard (reckless attitude of insured consumers), lead to higher pay-out by insurance companies. This cost is adjusted by increasing premium prices, which makes health insurance less attractive for the majority of Indians.
 - **Issues with private participation in public-funded health protection schemes:**
 - **Supply-induced demand:** When patients are protected under schemes like PMJAY, private hospitals can resort to over-prescription of medication, non-standardised tests, and a longer duration of therapy to generate additional revenue.
 - **High cost of premium** due to 18% GST burden.
 - **Low-reimbursement tariffs** set by the government deter genuine private hospitals to be part of such schemes.
 - **Overpriced drugs:** Private firms have invested heavily in R&D for new drugs, especially for

secondary and tertiary care; hence, the price of patented drugs is passed on to consumers.

Private participation can only complement but can not replace public spending on Health to achieve the goal of Universal Health Coverage. To move India towards UHC, the government, civil society, health-care providers, and communities need to work together.

PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES: RIGHTS & ISSUES

#VULNERABLE SECTIONS #PWDS

PRIMARY SOURCE THE HINDU

The International Day of Persons with Disabilities, observed on December 3rd, serves as a reminder of the ongoing challenges faced by persons with disabilities (PwDs) in India and around the world.

CHALLENGES FACED BY PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

- **Inadequate data:** Total PwDs population (2.68 crore) is based on the 2011 census, and is **not reflective** of the current status of disabled population.
- **Denial of disability:**
 - Fear of stigma often forces the family members to **hide the disability** or refer to it as a mere physical illness.
 - PwDs often **face harassment** in acquiring the disability certificate due to bureaucratic apathy.
- **Problem in accessing govt benefits/entitlements:**
 - The government arbitrarily **exempted certain establishments** from giving job quota to the disabled. **E.g.,** Blanket ban on all disabled persons, including acid attack victims, in all categories of police forces.
 - Posts which are reserved for disabled **remain unfilled** due to mismatch of skillset requirements.
 - Government initiatives like Digital India are increasingly delivering basic government functions through information technologies, but many of these are **still inaccessible** for users with visual or other disabilities.
- **Exclusion from the economic sphere:** Many PwDs have been denied or kept away from wage labour, due

to the wrong notion that disabled can not work and even if they work, **output would not be worth** the payment made. PwDs are also **denied property rights**.

- **Harassment:** Superstitions prevailing in the communities also play a big role in subjecting the people with disabilities to **various harmful treatments**. Women with disabilities face more discrimination but no special reservation for women within the disabled category.

NATIONAL POLICY FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES, 2006

National Policy for Persons with Disabilities (PWD) was formulated in 2006 which deals with Physical, Educational & Economic Rehabilitation of persons with disabilities.

The policy majorly focuses on following:

- **Prevention of Disabilities:** Lays strong emphasis on prevention of disabilities through routine immunisation, awareness measures and appropriate mother and childcare.
 - **Childhood vaccinations** against diseases such as polio, measles, mumps, rubella, and hepatitis B can prevent certain conditions that may lead to disabilities. Immunisation programs, when widely implemented, contribute to reducing the incidence of preventable disabilities.
 - **Adequate intake of folic acid** before and during early pregnancy significantly reduces the risk of neural tube defects (such as spina bifida) in newborns. Folic acid supplementation is a simple and effective preventive measure.
- **Rehabilitation measures:** Physical rehabilitation, early detection and intervention, counselling & medical interventions, and provision of aids & appliances. Educational rehabilitation including vocational education.
- **Economic rehabilitation** by providing reservation in public employment and promoting wage employment in the private sector and self-employment.
- **Barrier-free environment:** Make buildings, transportation systems and other public facilities barrier-free to enable PwDs to participate in everyday activities without assistance.
- **Identity:** Ensure PwDs obtain the disability certificates in the shortest possible time by adoption of simple, transparent and client- friendly procedures.

- **Social Security:** Governments will be encouraged to develop a comprehensive social security policy for disabled.

RIGHTS OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES ACT, 2016

The Act was enacted to fulfil the obligations to the **United National Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD)**.

- **Types of disabilities** covered under the Act increased from 7 to 21. It includes various physical and mental disabilities like acid attack victims, Dwarfism and Autism Spectrum Disorder.
- **Rights & entitlements:**
 - Reservation in higher education (>5%), government jobs (>4 %), poverty alleviation schemes (5%).
 - Right to free education from 6 to 18 years.
 - Ensure accessibility in public buildings (both Government and private) in a prescribed time-frame.
- **Central & State Advisory Boards on Disability** are to be set up to serve as **apex policy making bodies** at the Central and State level.
- **Penalties for offences** committed against PwDs and also violation of the provisions of the new law.
- **Special Courts** will be designated in each district to handle cases concerning violation of rights of PwDs.

However, **lack of sensitisation** of government functionaries and citizens became limitations to the effective implementation of the Act. Laws are as good as their implementation. Thus, sensitisation of Bureaucracy and community at large is important in ensuring full participation and inclusion of PwDs in the society.

INITIATIVES TAKEN FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

- **Accessible India Campaign:** Creation of Accessible Environment for PwDs. A nation-wide flagship campaign for achieving universal accessibility that will enable persons with disabilities to gain access for equal opportunity and live independently and participate fully in all aspects of life in an inclusive society.
- **Deendayal Disabled Rehabilitation Scheme:** Financial assistance is provided to NGOs for providing various services to Persons with Disabilities, like special schools, vocational training

centres, community- based rehabilitation, pre-school and early intervention etc.

NATIONAL POLICY ON FEMALE LABOUR FORCE PARTICIPATION

#VULNERABLE SECTIONS #GENDER EQUALITY

PRIMARY SOURCE THE HINDU

Central Government is planning to bring out a National Policy document on **female labour force participation (FLFP)** with a focus on providing an enabling atmosphere like a **viable care economy structure**.

MAJOR HIGHLIGHTS

- **Care Economy:**
 - **Care economy** is the sector of economic activities related to the **provision of care** (both paid and unpaid) for the present and future populations.
 - It includes services such as feeding a baby, cooking and cleaning, health care, education, and other personal and domestic services.
- One of the initiatives being explored is a **core skilling package for caregivers** for children.
- The government is also looking to provide **child care facilities for women in the informal sector**, such as for workers under the **National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme**.
 - The Ministry of Women and Child Development already runs the '**Palna**' scheme, or **National Programme on Anganwadi-cum-Crèche**, which provides day-care facilities for children of working parents.
 - A total of 1,000 Anganwadi creches are operational till now as part of this scheme.

ABOUT FEMALE LABOUR FORCE PARTICIPATION (FLFPR) RATE

- FLFPR rate refers to the share of women (>15 years) who are either working or looking for a job.
- **FLFP Rate in India:** As per the Periodic Labour Force Survey (2022-23) FLFPR for prime working age group (15 years & above) has increased from 23% in 2017-18 to **37 % in 2022-23**.

- As per the recent **World Bank report:**

- In India **post-marriage female employment rates drop by 12 percentage points** (about one-third of the female pre-marital employment rate), even in the absence of children.

NECESSITATING FACTORS FOR NATIONAL POLICY ON FLFP IN INDIA

- **Unpaid care work:** Women bear the burden of unpaid care work (taking care of children, elderly family members, and household chores). It is often undervalued and not recognised as work, which limits women's ability to participate in paid employment.
- **Societal norms:** In India, traditional gender division of labour dictate that women should focus on household duties and raising children, while men are primary breadwinners.
- **Lack of access to education:** Girls drop out of school early due to poverty or familial responsibilities. This limits their skill development and employment opportunities.
- However, presently, more women are pursuing higher education which can delay their entry into the workforce.
- **Health related** issues especially for older women, impact their productivity and contribute to low FLPR.
- **Limited job opportunities:** Women often face discrimination in the job market, and have fewer job opportunities compared to men. **E.g.,** Technology and finance sector.
- **Safety concerns,** harassment in workplace and while commuting to and from work, discourages them from seeking employment outside of the home.
- **Lack of supportive policies** such as parental leave, and flexible work arrangements (especially in the informal sector) do not enable women to balance work and family responsibilities.

According to the IMF, if women's participation in the workforce could match men's, the **GDP of India could increase by 27%**. Hence, the central government is working towards increasing the FLPR.

GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES TO IMPROVE FLFP

- **National Education Policy, 2020:** NEP prioritises gender equity and envisions ensuring equitable access to quality education to all students, with a special

emphasis on Socially and Economically Disadvantaged Groups (SEDGs).

- **One Stop Centre and Universalisation of Women Helpline:** To provide 24 hours immediate and emergency response to women affected by violence.
- **Maternity Benefit (Amendment) Act, 2017:** The Act increased the paid maternity leave from 12 weeks to 26 weeks, also made a provision for mandatory crèche facilities in establishments having 50 or more employees, permitting women workers in night shifts with adequate safety measures, etc.
- **Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace Act, 2013:** To provide protection against sexual harassment of women at workplace and for redressal of complaints of sexual harassment and for matters connected therewith.
- **Female Entrepreneurship:** To promote female entrepreneurship, the Government has initiated schemes like MUDRA, Stand Up India and Mahila e-Haat.
- **Rashtriya Mahila Kosh:** Provides micro-credit at concessional terms to poor women for various livelihood and income generating activities.
- **Prime Minister's Employment Generation Programme:** Under the scheme, women entrepreneurs are provided 25% and 35% subsidies for the project set up in urban and rural areas respectively.

WAY FORWARD

Need of National Women's Urban Employment Guarantee Act (WUEGA): Women should form at least 50% of the programme management staff, with a vision for decentralised management and local community involvement. Includes provisions for childcare at work sites, free public transportation for women, and work availability within a 5-km radius.

Case study of WUEGA: Women-led waste management in Karnataka, demonstrates the feasibility and success of women-centric programs: In this initiative women handle end-to-end waste management in gram panchayats of selected districts including collection and driving of the 'Swacch' vehicles.

JAPAN'S 'WOMENOMICS'

- Japan was grappling with falling fertility rates, declining population, and stagnant growth. A series of reforms on "womenomics" were introduced.
- Women's LFPR in Japan grew by 10%, from 64.9% in 2013 to 75.2% in 2023.
- Majority of the womenomics reforms have been linked to investments in the care economy and rebalancing gender norms.

- **Ensure High participation of women in MGNREGS:** Recommendations given by Parliamentary Standing Committee on Rural Development and Panchayati Raj:
 - The government must take measures for better promotion of "women-centric works" through creation or linking of existing livelihood projects under the scheme.
 - The Ministry of Rural Development needs to bridge the wage disparity among states by **notifying a uniform wage rate structure.**
- **Need for identification of Niche sectors, E.g.,** US's initiative (Girls Who Code in the US) to close the gender gap in technology. Japan and Italy are focusing on the healthcare and social work sectors for women.
- **Flexible work options:** Promote work models like part-time work, remote work, and parental leave policies to empower women to manage work-life balance effectively.
- **Accounting for care work:** There is a need to capture the value of care in the GDP calculation.

These strategies can contribute to meeting goals of SDG 1 (end poverty); SDG 3 (ensure healthy lives); SDG 4 (ensure inclusive and equitable quality education); SDG 5 (achieve gender equality) etc.

POSH ACT AND ITS APPLICABILITY TO POLITICAL PARTIES

#VULNERABLE SECTIONS

PRIMARY SOURCE *The Indian EXPRESS*

The Supreme Court heard a PIL stating that the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition

and Redressal) Act, 2013 (PoSH Act) should apply to political parties.

APPLICABILITY OF PoSH ACT ON POLITICAL PARTIES

- Provisions of the constitution of the Internal Complaint Committee (ICC) by political parties have not been made clear in the text of the PoSH Act. Thus, the **political parties are not liable** for the establishment of an ICC.
- In the present case, the SC directed the petitioner to first approach the Election Commission of India to prevail upon the recognised political parties for **creation of an in house mechanism** to deal with complaints of sexual harassment.

SEXUAL HARASSMENT OF WOMEN AT WORKPLACE (PREVENTION, PROHIBITION AND REDRESSAL) ACT, 2013

- **Definition:** The Act defined sexual harassment as any one or more of the following “unwelcome acts or behaviour” committed directly or by implication:
 - Physical contact and advances
 - A demand or request for sexual favours
 - Sexually coloured remarks
 - Showing pornography
 - Any other unwelcome physical, verbal or non-verbal conduct of sexual nature.
- **Applicability:**
 - Applicable to any woman who alleges to have subjected to sexual harassment at workplace. It includes domestic workers, daily wagers, former or informal employees etc. The act is also applicable to the women who visit a workplace.
 - ‘Workplace’ includes any place visited by the employee arising out of or during the course of employment.
- **Complaints committee:**
 - Internal complaints committee (ICC) to be established at each organisation **employing 10 or more employees** to hear and redress grievances pertaining to sexual harassment.
 - At the district level, the government is required to set up a ‘local committee’ to investigate and redress complaints of sexual harassment from the unorganised sector or from establishments where the ICC has not been constituted.

- These committees have the **powers of a civil court** under Code of Civil Procedure to summon the individuals and gather evidence during the interview process.
- **Complaint Mechanism:** An aggrieved woman is required to file the complaint within 3 months of the date of the incident.
- **Inquiry and Redressal procedure:**
 - The inquiry report of the complaints committee should be submitted to the organisation within 90 days. The employer is required to act on the recommendations of the complaints committee within 60 days of receipt of the Inquiry report.
 - Punishment prescribed under the service rules of the organisation.
- **Frivolous Complaints:** In order to ensure that the protections envisaged under the POSH Act are not misused, provisions for action against “false or malicious” complainants have been included in the statute.

HIGH DROPOUT RATES IN EKLAVYA MODEL RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS

#VULNERABLE SECTIONS #EDUCATION

PRIMARY SOURCE THE HINDU

The government data shows that **Eklavya Model Residential Schools (EMRS)** are struggling to meet a **sub quota of 5%** for the **Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs)** in admissions.

EKLAVYA MODEL RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS

- **EMRS** is a **central sector scheme** which aims to provide **quality education to Scheduled Tribes (ST) students** from Class 6 to Class 12.
 - The government planned to establish **one EMRS in every block** with more than 50% ST population and at least 20,000 tribal population as per 2011 census.
 - In blocks, where density of **ST population is higher than 90%**, **Eklavya Model Day Boarding Schools (EMDBS)** can be set up on an experimental basis.
 - 5% sub-quota for PVTG students in admissions to EMRS.

- Education is provided **free of cost** to tribal students in EMRS.
- **Focus:** Academic **education** plus **all-round development of students**.
 - EMRS have **special facilities for preserving local art & culture** besides providing training in sports and skill development.
 - Each school has a capacity of 480 students and is on par with Navodaya Schools.
- **Implementation:**
 - **Administered by:** Ministry of Tribal Affairs
 - National Education Society for Tribal Students (**NESTS**), an autonomous organisation, has been created to manage and **implement the scheme of EMRS**.
 - **The recruitment for teachers** for EMRS schools is done by the National Education Society for Tribal Students.

PARTICULARLY VULNERABLE TRIBAL GROUPS (PVTGs)

- PVTGs are some tribes who are more vulnerable because of their extreme backwardness and low literacy.
 - In 1973, **Dhebar Commission** created Primitive Tribal Groups (PTGs) as a separate category, which are less developed among the tribal groups.
 - In 2006, the Government renamed PTGs as PVTGs.
- **Criteria for identification of PVTGs:**
 - Pre-agricultural level of technology
 - Low level of literacy
 - Economic backwardness
 - A declining or stagnant population Accordingly,
- **75 PTVGs have been identified across the country**, spread over 18 states and 1 Union Territory (Andaman & Nicobar). Among the 75 listed PVTGs the highest number are found in Odisha (13), followed by Andhra Pradesh (12).

FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO HIGH DROPOUT RATES IN EMRS

- **Quality of Education:** Academic performance of EMRSs has been below national averages.

- Achievement Surveys from 2017 show that EMRSs scored lower than the national average, with the highest score being just 52.8%, slightly above the national average for Scheduled Tribe students.
- **Infrastructure Gaps:** Many EMRSs lack adequate facilities **affecting** the learning environment.
 - As of June 2023, out of 684 sanctioned schools, only 46 had their own premises; the rest operated in rented or government buildings.
- **Significant deficit of qualified teachers** which adversely impacts educational quality.
 - In 2021, 3,400 teaching posts were advertised, but the recruitment process was cancelled in 2022. Consequently, about 70% of teachers are either contractual or on deputation.
- **Pressure to Work:** Tribal students often face economic hardships, compelling them to work and contribute to family income, leading to higher dropout rates.
 - Tribal Development Report 2022 indicates that 48.2% of tribal children leave school before completing Class 8, and this number rises to 62.4% by Class 10.

To reduce dropout rates in EMRS, there is a need to prioritise infrastructure development and teacher recruitment. The government must ensure financial aid to tribal families and establish vocational training. Use of digital tools along with their robust monitoring would enhance academic and will foster long-term educational inclusivity.

END TO 'NO DETENTION POLICY' FOR CLASS 5TH AND 8TH

#EDUCATION

PRIMARY SOURCE *The Indian EXPRESS*

Central Government has scrapped the 'No Detention Policy' for class 5 and class 8 in Central schools. The No detention policy stated that no student can be held back for not fulfilling the promotion criteria after the exam. Now, the students who do not pass their year-end exams will be marked as failed and will need to retake the tests.

No automatic promotions in classes 5 and 8

THE NEW POLICY

- 1 Centre abolishes automatic promotion system for students in classes 5 and 8
- 2 Implements competency-based examination system

WHY THE SHIFT?

23 of 28 states requested policy change in Aug 2015

Parliament amended RTE Act in March 2019, after which 16 states and 2 UTs abandoned approach

ADDITIONAL SUPPORT FOR STUDENTS

- Students who fail will receive re-examination opportunity within two months
- School heads must maintain records of struggling students
- Class teachers required to guide both students and parents
- Mandatory remedial teaching for failing students
- Focus on identifying and addressing learning gaps

"We want access, but also want to improve learning outcome among students under NEP. Through changes in the rules, we will be able to pay attention to those students who are not good at studies."

— SANJAY KUMAR, school education secretary

WHAT NOW

States given authority to reintroduce examinations

New policy in effect in over 3,000 central government schools, including all Kendriya Vidyalayas, Navodaya Vidyalayas, and Sainik Schools

ABOUT NO DETENTION POLICY

- No Detention Policy was introduced in **2009** under the **Right to Education Act**, as part of the **Continuous and Comprehensive Evaluation process (CCE)** for elementary schools as against the year-end traditional examination process.
- **Aim:** To prevent students from being held back due to poor academic performance, as this was seen as a major factor contributing to school dropouts.
- By allowing automatic promotion, the **policy aimed to create equal opportunities** for children from diverse backgrounds and enable them to complete elementary education regardless of academic challenges.

Status of No Detention policy:

- Parliament amended the **RTE Act in March 2019**, allowing states to conduct regular exams in Classes 5 and 8 and **officially ending** the 'No Detention Policy'.
- Education is a **state** subject, so the States and Union Territories can still decide **whether to continue or end** the policy in their schools. Already 16 states and 2 UTs including Delhi have abandoned the no-detention policy for these two classes.

REASONS TO SCRAP NO DETENTION POLICY

- **Improve learning outcomes:** In 2016, the Central Advisory Board on Education (CABE) recommended scrapping the policy as students were no longer serious about their studies. Through changes in the rules, schools will be able to pay attention to those students who are not good at studies to improve learning outcomes.
- **Reduced accountability of schools:** It has been argued that the policy led to erosion of accountability

in elementary education, and schools are just centres for the mid-day meal, as education and learning are missing.

- **Sync with NEP 2020:** Improving the examination standard is a mandate of National Education Policy 2020, and detention may help in improving the standards of the exams.

PM INTERNSHIP SCHEME

#SOCIAL JUSTICE #EDUCATION

PRIMARY SOURCE THE HINDU

The pilot scheme of the Prime Minister's Internship Scheme has received approximately 6.21 lakh applications against 1.27 lakh opportunities under the scheme.

ABOUT PRIME MINISTER'S INTERNSHIP SCHEME

- Announced in the Budget 2024-25. **A Pilot Project** of the Scheme **targeted at providing 1.25 lakh internship opportunities** has been launched for the Financial Year 2024-25.
- **Initiative of:** Ministry of Corporate Affairs
- **Aim:** To provide internship opportunities to **one crore youth** in top 500 companies in five years.
- **Sectors:** Internship opportunities in oil, gas, energy, travel, hospitality, automotive, banking and financial services, etc.

ELIGIBILITY

- **12-month internship program** designed for **youth aged 21 to 24 years** for **Indian nationals** who are **not employed full-time or engaged in full-time education**.
- Family income less **Rs 8 Lakh**.
- Candidates who have passed High School or Higher Secondary School, certificate from ITI, diploma from polytechnic institute.
- **Graduated with degrees** such as BA, B.Sc, B.Com, BCA, BBA, B.Pharmaceutical, etc.
- **Not eligible:** Graduates from **premier institutions** (IITs, IIMs etc.) or holders of qualifications such as CA, BDS, MBBS or any master's/higher degree.
- Internships can be **applied for through the PM Internship Portal**.

FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

- **Monthly stipend:** ₹5,000 during internship through DBT.
- **One-time grant:** ₹6,000 will be disbursed through DBT.

Significance: Bridging gap between academic learning and industry requirements and enhancing employability and skills among participants.

KEY INITIATIVES IN THE FIELD OF SKILL DEVELOPMENT

- **STRIVE Project** focuses on entrepreneurship and mentoring in ITIs and NSTIs.
- **PM-JANMAN initiative** targets skilling and uplifting vulnerable tribal groups.
- **SANKALP** - marginalised communities receive support for entrepreneurship
- **Initiatives under the Skill India Mission** (Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship)
 - **Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY)** - short-term skill training
 - **Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Kendra's (PMKK)** - standardises quality training across India.
 - **Jan Shikshan Sansthan** - targets non-literate and rural populations.
 - **Pradhan Mantri YUVA Yojana** - promotes entrepreneurship.
 - **Skill India Digital** - introduces AI-driven tools for job matching and continuous learning.
 - **PM Vishwakarma Yojana** - supports traditional artisans by modernising their skills and integrating them into global markets, ensuring sustainable livelihoods.

INDIA SKILLS REPORT 2025

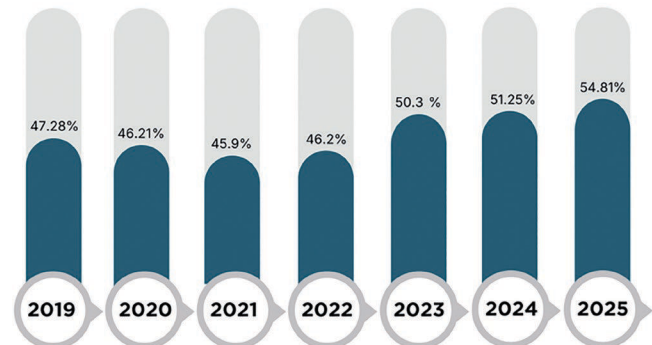
#LABOUR #EMPLOYMENT

PRIMARY
SOURCE THE HINDU

Kerala continues to shine as one of the most employable States in India, as indicated by the recently launched **India Skills Report 2025**.

How Employability has Changed Over the Years?

2019 - 2025

**KEY FINDINGS OF INDIA SKILLS REPORT 2025**

- India's National Employability stands at **54.8%** indicating a significant pool of talent scoring above 60% on the Wheebox Global Employability Test (GET) with **Maharashtra leading with 84% employability followed by Delhi (78%), Karnataka (75%), Andhra Pradesh (72%), Kerala (71%) and Uttar Pradesh (70%).**
- Male employability is slightly **higher (53.47%)** than female (**46.53%**).
- **Kerala** is one of the top States favoured for employment, alongside Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, and Uttar Pradesh.
- The report highlights that **over half of Indian graduates are now employable**, a significant rise from 33% a decade ago.

KEY FACTS ABOUT INDIA SKILLS REPORT

- **Published by: Wheebox** in association with the **All India Council for Technical Education, Confederation of Indian Industry and Association of Indian Universities.**
- It evaluates employability of candidates who participated in the **Global Employability Test (GET)** conducted across India.
- The report **captures critical trends in skills demand**, sectoral employability, and regional talent distribution. This will serve as a vital resource for policymakers, academia, and industries.

PRACTICE QUESTIONS

MCQS

Q1. With reference to "The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act(2013)", consider the following statements:

1. The Act defines what constitutes the definition of sexual harassment.
2. Every employer is required to set up an Internal Complaints Committee at each office or branch with 30 or more staff members.
3. The Act offers no protection against a false complaint of sexual harassment.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- | | |
|------------------|------------------|
| (a) 1 only | (b) 1 and 2 only |
| (c) 2 and 3 only | (d) 1, 2 and 3 |

Q2. Consider the following statements :

1. As per the Right to Education (RTE) Act, to be eligible for appointment as a teacher in a State, a person would be required to possess the minimum qualification laid down by the concerned State Council of Teacher Education.
2. As per the RTE Act, for teaching primary classes, a candidate is required to pass a Teacher Eligibility Test conducted in accordance with the National Council of Teacher Education guidelines.
3. In India, more than 90% of teacher education institutions are directly under the State Governments.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- | | |
|------------------|------------|
| (a) 1 and 2 only | (b) 2 only |
| (c) 1 and 3 only | (d) 3 only |

Q3. Consider the following statements with reference to the India Skills Report 2025:

1. The India Skills Report is published by Wheebox in collaboration with All India Council for Technical Education.

2. The recent report highlights that India's national employability is increasing year-on-year.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- | | |
|------------------|---------------------|
| (a) 1 only | (b) 2 only |
| (c) Both 1 and 2 | (d) Neither 1 nor 2 |

Q4. Consider the following statements given above is/are correct Eklavya Model Residential Scheme (EMRS):

1. The recruitment for teachers for EMRS schools is done by States.

2. All districts of India will have Eklavya Model Residential Schools.

3. No fee is charged by these schools.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- | | |
|------------------|------------|
| (a) 1 and 2 only | (b) 2 only |
| (c) 1 and 3 only | (d) 3 only |

Q5. With respect to Prime Minister's Internship Scheme (PMIS); consider the following statements:

1. It aims to provide internship opportunities to ten crore youth in five years.

2. The Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship is the designated nodal ministry for the management of the scheme.

3. Graduates and Postgraduates from all kinds of institutions are eligible for enrolment in this scheme.

How many of the statements given above are correct?

- | | |
|---------------|--------------|
| (a) Only one | (b) Only two |
| (c) All three | (d) None |

DESCRIPTIVE QUESTIONS

Q1. Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs) are rapidly increasing in India, particularly in the Urban areas in epidemic proportions. Establish the link between urbanisation and the rising incidences of NCDs.

Q2. The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016 remains only a legal document without intense sensitisation of government functionaries and citizens regarding disability. Comment.

Answers: 1-a, 2-b, 3-c, 4-d, 5-d

GEOGRAPHY, ENVIRONMENT, BIODIVERSITY & DISASTER MANAGEMENT

GS PAPER (PRELIMS) AND GS PAPER I & III (MAIN)

INDIA STATE OF FOREST REPORT 2023

#CONSERVATION

PRIMARY
SOURCE The Indian
EXPRESS

Recently, the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change has released the '**India State of Forest Report 2023**' (ISFR 2023). The report shows a marginal gain of 156 sq. km in forest cover, and a sizable increase of 1,289 sq km in tree cover since 2021.

WHAT IS THE INDIA STATE OF FOREST REPORT?

- The India State of Forest Report is a **biennial report** published by the **Forest Survey of India (FSI)**, an organisation of the Ministry of Environment, Forest & Climate Change.
 - FSI monitors India's forest and tree resources through periodic assessments and presents the findings in its biennial report.
- The **first State of Forest report was brought out in 1987**. The current report, ISFR 2023 is 18th in the series.

KEY TERMS

- Tree cover:** It is defined as all tree patches of size less than one hectare occurring outside the recorded forest area. This covers trees in all formations including scattered trees.
- Forest area:** It denotes the legal status of the land as per the government records, whereas the term

'forest cover' indicates presence of trees over any land.

- Forest carbon stock:** It is the amount of carbon that has been sequestered from the atmosphere and is now stored within the forest ecosystem, mainly within living biomass and soil, and to a lesser extent also in dead wood and litter.
- National Forest Inventory:** A systematic approach to generate national level estimates on growing stock, forest area and other forest resources parameters by doing regular inventory in selected sample districts in a cycle of two years.

Table: Forest and Tree Cover of India

Class	Area	in km ²
		Percentage of GA
Forest Cover	7,15,342.61	21.76
Tree Cover	1,12,014.34	3.41
Total Forest and Tree Cover	8,27,356.95	25.17
Scrub	43,622.64	1.33
Non Forest	24,16,489.29	73.50
Geographical Area of the country	32,87,468.88	100.00

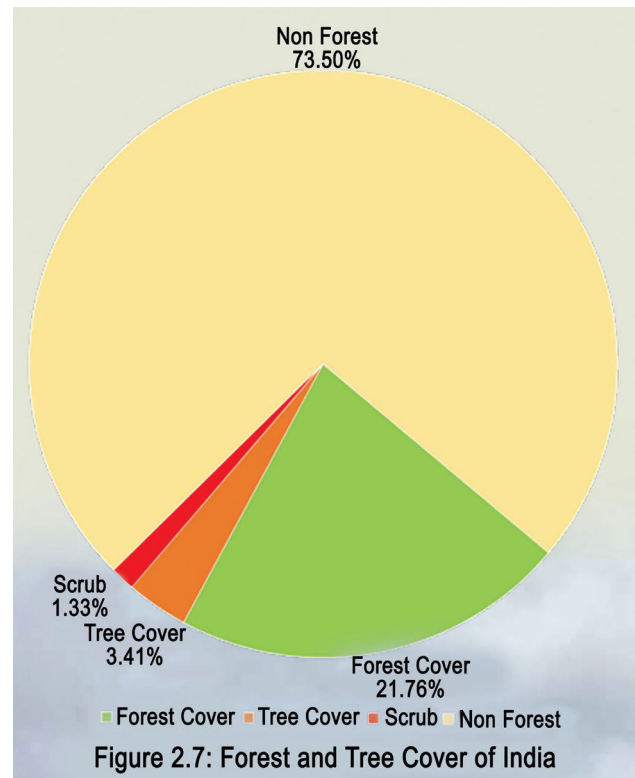
KEY FINDINGS OF ISFR 2023

- The **Forest and Tree cover** of India is **8,27,357 sq km** which is 25.17% of the geographical area of the country, consisting of:
 - 7,15,343 sq km (21.76%) as forest cover.
 - 1,12,014 sq km (3.41%) as tree cover.
- For the first time, **India's green cover has exceeded the 25% threshold**. Of this, 49.57% (4,10,175 sq km) is classified as **dense forests**.

- **Increase in tree cover and forest cover:**
 - Sharpest **growth (0.5%) in tree cover** (from 2.91% in 2021 to 3.41% in 2023)
 - Marginal growth in **forest cover (0.05%)** since 2021.
 - Between 2003 and 2013, forest cover increased by 0.61%, from 20.62% to 21.23%.
 - In the next 10 years, it grew by only 0.53% to 21.76%.
- **Total mangrove cover** is 4,992 sq km in the country.
- **Total bamboo bearing area** is 1,54,670 sq km. (an increase from 2021).
- **Total carbon stock in the country's forest** is estimated to be **7,285.5 million tonnes** (an increase of 81.5 million tonnes as compared to 2021).
- **India's carbon stock has reached 30.43 billion tonnes of CO2 equivalent;** which indicates that as compared to the base year of 2005, India has already reached 2.29 billion tonnes of additional carbon sink as against the target of 2.5 to 3.0 billion tonnes by 2030.

RANKINGS OF STATES & UTS

- **Top four states showing maximum increase in forest and tree cover:** Chhattisgarh (684 sq km) > Uttar Pradesh (559 sq km) > Odisha > Rajasthan.
- **Top three states showing maximum increase in forest cover:** Mizoram (242 sq km) > Gujarat > Odisha.
- **Area wise top three states having largest forest and tree cover:** Madhya Pradesh (85,724 sq km) > Arunachal Pradesh > Maharashtra.
- **Area wise top three states having largest forest cover:** Madhya Pradesh (77,073 sq km) > Arunachal Pradesh > Chhattisgarh.
- **In terms of percentage forest cover with respect to total geographical area:** Lakshadweep (91.3 %) > Mizoram (85.3 %) > Andaman & Nicobar Island.
- **19 states/UTs** have **above 33%** of the geographical area under forest cover.
 - According to the **National Forest Policy of 1988**, 33% of India's geographical area is required to be forests.
- **8 states/UTs:** Mizoram, Lakshadweep, A & N Island, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Meghalaya, Tripura, and Manipur **have forest cover above 75%.**



TYPES OF FORESTS

- **Forests:** Irrespective of land use or ownership, **tree patches measuring 1 hectare or more with a minimum canopy cover of 10% are counted as forests in India.**
- **Dense forests:** Areas with a **canopy density of 40% and above are considered dense forests**
- **Open forests:** Areas with **canopy density of 10-40% are open forests (OF).**
- **Very dense forests:** Since 2003, areas with **at least 70% canopy density have been classified as very dense forests (VDF).**

****Canopy density:** It is the percentage of an area that is covered by the crowns of trees. It's also known as forest canopy density (FCD) or crown cover. Canopy density is a key indicator of a forest's health and is used to assess the forest's condition and potential management actions.

CONCERNING FINDINGS OF THE REPORT

- ISFR-2023 shows that **3,913 sq km of dense forests (an area larger than Goa) have disappeared** in India in just two years since 2021.

- India has witnessed the **complete destruction of 24,651 sq km (more than 6.3%) of its dense forests in the two decades since 2003.**
- The **bulk of this loss has been offset by the rapid transformation of 15,530 sq km of non-forested or**

scantly forested land to dense or even very dense forests (during 2003-2023).

- However, **this offset has been accomplished through Plantations**, because natural forests do not grow this fast.

CHANGE IN DENSE FOREST COVER 2003-2023

LOST	2021-23	2003-13	2013-23	2003-23	GAINED	2021-23	2003-13	2013-23	2003-23
VDF to NF	295	288	1,277	1,565	NF to VDF	56	43	483	526
MDF to NF	3,362	6,714	15,086	21,800	NF to MDF	839	3,631	7,554	11,185
VDF to scrub	24	5	65	70	Scrub to VDF	1	0	54	54
MDF to scrub	313	144	1,153	1,297	Scrub to MDF	102	105	1,043	1,148
Disappeared	3,994	7,151	17,581	24,732	OF to VDF	496	124	2,567	2,691
VDF to OF	228	134	1,128	1,262	Plantations	1,494	3,903	11,701	15,604
MDF to OF	5,166	6,414	22,249	28,663	OF to MDF	8,610	6,122	34,301	40,423
TOTAL LOSS	9,388	13,699	40,958	54,657	TOTAL GAIN	10,104	10,025	46,002	56,027

NET CHANGE

2021-23: 716

2003-13: -3,674

2013-23: 5,044

2003-23: 1,370

Source: ISFR 2003-23

VDF: Very Dense Forest (canopy over 70%); MDF: Moderate Dense Forest (canopy 40-70%); OF: Open Forest (canopy 10-40%); Scrub (canopy under 10%); NF: Non-Forest (no canopy)

CONUNDRUM OF DENSE FORESTS

- Areas under plantations-as-dense-forests are expanding** as the disappearance of natural dense forests becomes routine.
- Large swaths of **Open forest (OFs) become Moderately dense forest (MDFs) in the last decade** owing to better management. At the same time, **plantations are supplementing these natural gains** to keep the extent of India's dense forest cover stable.
- Though, India's dense forest cover has grown by 6% during 2003-2023. Experts question such an increase as they were brought through a **series of unexplained revisions of data** presented in ISFR adding a total of 20,232 sq km of dense forest to the inventory.

Plantations as Natural Forest - Issues and Implications:

- Plantations usually have **trees of the same age (and often the same species), are vulnerable to fire, pests and epidemics.**
- Plantations **often act as a barrier to the regeneration of natural forests** which are more biodiverse, perform a wider range of ecological functions, and support numerous species.
- Old natural forests stock a lot more carbon in their frame and in the soil.** In 2018, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) flagged India's assumption that plantations reach the carbon stock level of existing forests in just eight years.
- Plantations are frequently promoted** for their rapid growth which can achieve carbon targets faster.

However, **plantations are often harvested more readily**, defeating climate goals in the long term.

SACRED GROVES

#CONSERVATION

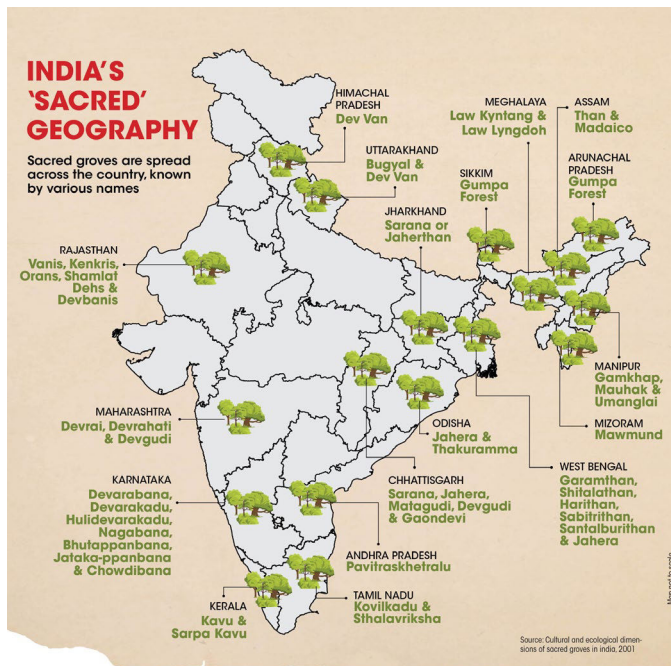
PRIMARY SOURCE THE HINDU

*The Supreme Court has directed the Central Government to **create a comprehensive policy for the management of sacred groves across the country.***

WHAT ARE SACRED GROVES?

- UNESCO (1996)** defined Sacred Groves as an **area of natural vegetation preserved through local taboos and sanctions** that entail spiritual and ecological values.
 - Protected by local communities for their religious and cultural significance.
 - Important sites for worship and community gatherings.
 - Logging and hunting are strictly prohibited.
- Found all over India** - especially in Maharashtra, Karnataka, Kerala, and Tamil Nadu. There are around 14,000 sacred groves reported across India.

They are known by different names in different parts of India.



SIGNIFICANCE

- Act as a repository for **various Ayurvedic medicines**. It is a source of replenishable resources like fruits and honey.
- Harbor **great genetic diversity**. They have **become biodiversity hotspots**, as various species seek refuge here, due to habitat destruction and hunting elsewhere.
- Often associated with **ponds and streams**, and meet water requirements of local communities. They help in recharging aquifers as well.
- Prohibition of cutting trees helps **reduce soil erosion** and prevents desertification.
- Act as **lungs in urban landscapes**, providing much needed vegetation cover.

WHY IS THIS DIRECTIVE SIGNIFICANT?

- The Centre has usually maintained that the management of wildlife and its habitat is **primarily the responsibility of the States**.
- The Wild Life (Protection) Act 1972 has empowered States for declaration of any private or community land, as a **community reserve**, for protecting fauna, flora and traditional or cultural conservation values and practices.
- The preservation of sacred groves is aligned with the **cultural and traditional rights of entire communities**.

- Thus, SC has asked the Ministry of Environment, Forest & Climate Change to develop a **plan for a nationwide survey of sacred groves** to identify the area and extent of the groves. The boundaries of the groves have to be clearly marked but left flexible to accommodate future growth of the forests.

** The **court cited the case study of Piplantri village** to highlight how a community-driven initiative came to effectively address social, ecological and environmental challenges in a cohesive manner.

PIPLANTRI VILLAGE, RAJASTHAN

- A village in the Rajsamand district of **Rajasthan**, was once a victim to denuded land due to marble mining, exhausted foliage and gender inequality.
- From being a usual Indian village, Piplantri went on to gain international recognition for its unique model where the **villagers plant 111 trees whenever a girl child is born**. The girl's parents and the villagers get together to raise a Fixed Deposit of ₹31,000 to support girl child's future.
- The movement was spearheaded by the Padma Shri, **Shyam Sundar Paliwal**. Soon the village was able to revive their land and even earn additional income through the forest produce.
- The village now has more than 350,000 trees, with various indigenous varieties, proving to be a boon to the Environment and Climate.

STATES GOT ONLY 19% OF FUNDS SOUGHT FROM NDRF

#DISASTERMANAGEMENT

PRIMARY
SOURCE

BusinessLine

Between 2019 and 2024, states requested approximately ₹1.5 lakh crore from the Central government. However, the Central Government has released only **₹29,263 crore** under the **National Disaster Response Fund (NDRF)**.

FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE FRAMEWORK FOR DISASTER MANAGEMENT IN INDIA

It includes two primary mechanisms:

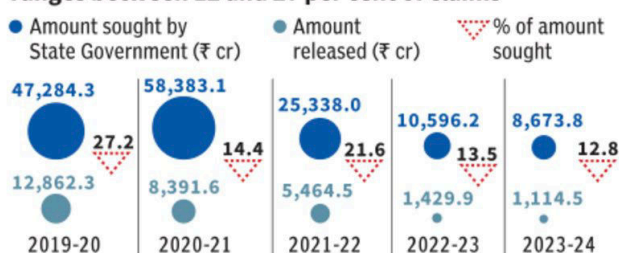
1. **State Disaster Response Fund (SDRF):**

- Centre provides 75% of the amount for general-category States.
- 90% for the north-eastern and Himalayan States.
- The remaining contribution is done by respective state governments.

2. National Disaster Response Fund (NDRF):

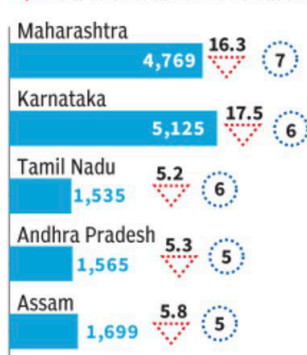
- Fully funded by the Central government to assist the States when SDRF funds are exhausted.

Amount released by NDRF for natural calamities ranges between 12 and 27 per cent of claims



Top five States with highest number of major calamities

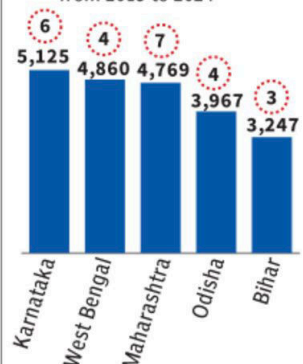
- Number of major calamities from 2019 to 2024
- Funds released from 2019 to 2024 (₹ cr)
- ▽ As a % of total funds released



Source: Lok Sabha, NDM India

Karnataka, West Bengal and Maharashtra received most funds from NDRF

- Funds released from 2019 to 2024 (₹ cr)
- Number of major calamities from 2019 to 2024



DISASTER FINANCING IN INDIA

• Role of State Governments:

- First response to disasters- organising rescue, evacuation and relief and providing people with assistance.
- Responsibility for recovery and reconstruction also lies primarily with State Governments.
- Fund these activities using SDRF.

- Can request additional financial assistance from NDRF, by submitting memorandums to the Union Government.

• Role of Union Government:

- Extends secondary support to states via NDRF and Armed forces.
- NDRF replenishes and reinforces the State funds following a set of guidelines.

FUNDS CREATED BY DISASTER MANAGEMENT (DM) ACT, 2005

DM Act, 2005 lays down the framework for disaster financing in India. The act establishes the following funds:

1. National Disaster Relief Fund (NDRF):

- Supports the State Government in the event of severe calamities, where the requirement of funds for relief operations is beyond SDRF.
- The State Government is required to submit a memorandum indicating the sector wise damage and requirement of funds.

2. State Disaster Relief Fund (SDRF):

- The State Disaster Response Fund shall be used only for meeting the expenditure for providing immediate relief to the victims of cyclone, drought, earthquake, fire, flood, tsunami, hailstorm, landslide, avalanche, cloud burst, pest attack, frost, and cold wave.

3. National Disaster Mitigation Fund (NDMF) & State Disaster Mitigation Fund: (SDMF):

- Though provided in the Disaster Management Act, 2005, these funds had not been operationalised.
- The 15th Finance Commission has recommended the constitution of NDMF and SDMF.
- The Mitigation Fund would be used for local level and community-based interventions to reduce disaster risks and promote environmentally friendly settlements.

CONCERNS WITH THE PRESENT DISASTER FINANCING FRAMEWORK

- **Lack of focus on Mitigation:** Allocations made through the SDRF and NDRF help governments meet their contingent liabilities in the face of disaster. However, these allocations do not help in **reducing contingent liabilities** (failure to reduce disaster risk).
- **Lack of flexibility for states:** Current guidelines for providing relief from the SDRF and NDRF are determined by the Central Government. States have been demanding greater flexibility for their unique

needs of certain areas, especially remote and hilly terrains.

- **Limited list of disasters eligible:** Many State Governments have been arguing for widening the scope for inclusion of several calamities in the eligible list of disasters for funding support from the SDRF and NDRF. However, most of these calamities are State-specific or region-specific and can be difficult to quantify. For example, Heatwaves, river and coastal erosion, fire hazards, lightning deaths are not eligible for ex-gratia assistance.
- **Limited quantum of funds allocated to SDRF and NDRF:** Current practice of allocating funds to SDRF and NDRF is based on past expenditures incurred by States and Union government on Disaster Management and Relief. The expenditure-based approach tends to favour better off states, which can allocate resources and show higher expenditures. Risk and vulnerability to disasters are currently not taken into consideration.
- **Inability of states to meet matching grants towards SDRF:** Mandates relating to operating of disaster-related funds require the States to transfer their matching share towards the SDRF along with Union's share received by them. However, some States do not make transfers into the public account maintained by them in a timely manner. This results in inadequate funds being available with States to tackle disasters of a severe nature and they seek additional central assistance from the NDRF.
- **Exclusion of long-term or permanent restoration works from the ambit of NDRF/SDRF:** Existing norms for disaster relief from SDRF and NDRF do not provide sufficient funds for reconstruction of housing and infrastructure, resettlement of people from floodplains, coastal and hilly areas. This forces states to look after the World Bank or Central Government for long term resettlement and recovery efforts.
- **Slow process:** Current process of assessment for the determination of Union assistance through the NDRF as well as its release is slow. Often funds required for disaster relief are required immediately, especially after severe disasters.
- **GST regime:** NDRF was financed by National Calamity Contingent Duty (NCCD). However, a substantial amount of NCCD has been subsumed under the GST. NCCD is currently being levied on very few products such as Tobacco and crude petroleum. This leaves very little fiscal space for the Union Government to finance

the NDRF. Thus, the central government will have to incur additional fiscal deficit for financing NDRF.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO STRENGTHEN DISASTER FINANCING IN INDIA

- **Focus on Disaster Mitigation:** NDMF and SD MF should be operationalised which should amount for 20% of overall funds allocated to NDRF and SDRF.
- **Risk based fund allocation:** Allocation to SDRF should be a combination of capacity (as reflected by expenditure), risk exposure (area and population) and hazard and vulnerability (risk index).
- **Separate window for long-term reconstruction:** A separate Recovery and Reconstruction facility should be created with SDRF and NDRF with about 30% allocation. This will help people affected by disasters on a long-term basis.
- **Separate window for capacity building:** Current disaster financing mechanism overlooks capacity building required to effectively respond to disasters in the States. Capacity building measures like early warning systems and emergency equipment etc. are essential for effective disaster management. Thus, a separate window for capacity building should be created in SDRF and NDRF.
- **Constitution of District level Disaster Response and Mitigation Funds:** State Government can allocate resources to districts for preparedness and mitigation of disaster on an annual basis.
- **Using flex-fund component of CSS towards Disaster Management:** States hit by severe disaster should be permitted to use more than the 25% flexi-fund component of centrally sponsored schemes to carry out post-disaster permanent restoration works.
- **Mainstreaming Disaster Insurance Pool:** After the liberalisation of India's insurance industry, it is essential to leverage insurance sector to substantially reduce the financial burden of disaster management by households, particularly well-to-do ones.

KEN-BETWA LINK PROJECT

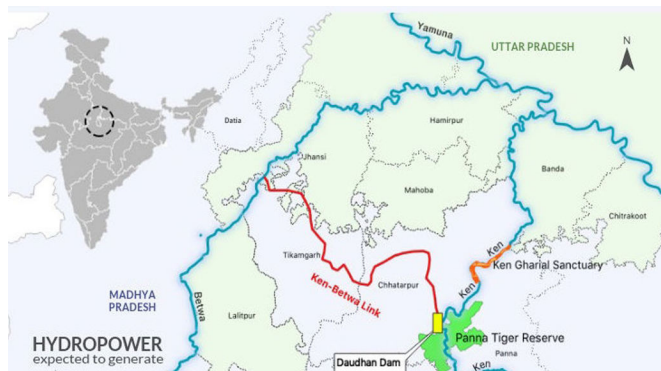
#RIVERLINKING #INFRASTRUCTURE

PRIMARY
SOURCE THE HINDU

The Prime Minister of India laid the foundation stone for the Ken-Betwa river linking project in Khajuraho, Madhya Pradesh.

KEN-BETWA LINK PROJECT

- The Ken-Betwa link project envisages transferring of **surplus water from Ken basin to water short areas of Betwa basin by substitution. Both rivers are tributaries of the Yamuna.**



- The Ken-Betwa link project will be implemented in two phases.
 - Phase I:** involves construction of 77 m high **Daudhan dam** across river Ken.
 - Phase II:** involves construction of **Lower Orr dam, Kotha Barrage and Bina Complex.**
- The **estimated cost of the project is around ₹45,000 crore.**

KEN RIVER

- Interstate river** between Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh.
- Tributary of the Yamuna.**
- Origin:** North-west slopes of **Kaimur hills** in Madhya Pradesh.
- The **river joins the Yamuna** river near village Chilla (Banda district), near Fatehpur in Uttar Pradesh.
- The river is the **last tributary of Yamuna** before the Yamuna joins the Ganga.

BETWA RIVER

- Origin:** Raisen district of Madhya Pradesh, south-west of Bhopal.
- It is an **interstate river** between the two states viz. Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh.
- It flows in a north-easterly direction through Madhya Pradesh and **enters into Uttar Pradesh** near village Bangawan of Jhansi district.
- The river joins the Yamuna** near Hamirpur in Uttar Pradesh.

BACKGROUND

- 1980: Ken-Betwa Link is the first project under the **National Perspective Plan** for interlinking of rivers.
- 2005: Tripartite MoU for preparation of a **detailed project report** was signed among the Central government, Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh.
- 2008: Centre declared the Ken Betwa Link Project as a **National Project.**
- Later, it was included as part of the Prime Minister's package for the development of the drought-prone Bundelkhand region.

SIGNIFICANCE

- The project is expected to provide **annual irrigation to 10.62 lakh hectares** (8.11 lakh ha in MP and 2.51 lakh ha in UP) of land, **and supply drinking water to about 62 lakh people.**
 - Will solve the water crisis of **Bundelkhand region**, spread across Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh.
 - Will benefit **water-starved** districts of Panna, Tikamgarh, Chhatarpur, Sagar, Damoh, Datia, Vidisha, Shivpuri and Raisen of **Madhya Pradesh**, and Banda, Mahoba, Jhansi and Lalitpur districts of **Uttar Pradesh.**
- It aims to generate more than **100 MW of hydropower and 27 MW of solar energy.**

CHALLENGES AND CRITICISM**1. Environmental:**

- The project will **involve large-scale deforestation in Panna National Park and Tiger Reserve.**
 - Serious concerns about submergence of around 98 sq. km. of Panna National park, and felling of about two to three million trees.
 - The Supreme Court's Central Empowered Committee (CEC) has pointed out that the **project will undo the successful tiger reintroduction** that helped the tiger population bounce back from local extinction in 2009.
- CEC also noted that in its downstream side, Daudhan dam is **likely to affect the Gharial population in the Ken Gharial sanctuary along with vulture nesting sites.**
- A study published by IIT Bombay highlighted that moving large quantities of water as part of river linking projects **can affect land-atmosphere interplay and**

feedback and lead to a **mean rainfall deficit** by up to 12 per cent.

2. Social:

- The dam will **displace** 5,228 families in Chhatarpur district and 1,400 families in Panna district due to submergence and project-related acquisition.
- The project has witnessed severe protest over the issue of inadequate compensation and rehabilitation plans.

POLAVARAM DAM PROJECT

#INFRASTRUCTURE

PRIMARY SOURCE THE HINDU

Polavaram Dam project (Andhra Pradesh) is feared to have adverse impacts on the tribal communities in Odisha's Malkangiri district (Odisha).

POLAVARAM DAM PROJECT

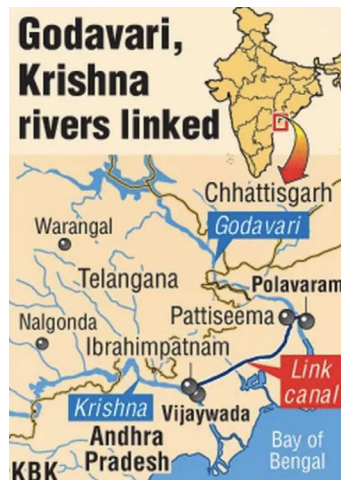
- It is an **under construction** multi-purpose irrigation project on the **Godavari River**.
- It is located in the Polavaram mandal of the **Eluru district** (formerly West Godavari district) in **Andhra Pradesh**.

PURPOSE

- In this project, **Godavari-Krishna inter-linking** will be implemented under the inter-linking of rivers project. The project envisages transfer of **80 TMC** of surplus water of Godavari river to **Krishna river** to be shared between Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Maharashtra.
- It is a **multi-purpose project** for **irrigation, developing hydropower and providing drinking water** facilities to East Godavari, Visakhapatnam, West Godavari and Krishna districts of Andhra Pradesh.

BACKGROUND

- The Polavaram Irrigation Project on the river Godavari was conceived as a part of the **recommendations of the Godavari Water Disputes Tribunal (GWDT)**.



Polavaram Irrigation Project (PIP)

Multipurpose Terminal Reservoir Project on the River Godavari, near Ramayyapeta Village in Eluru District

<p>Reservoir Gross Capacity:</p> <p>194.6 tmc at Full Reservoir Level (FRL) of +45.72 m</p>	<p>BENEFITS</p> <p>■ 80 TMC of water to Krishna River will be shared between Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, and Maharashtra in the ratio of 45 TMC, 21 TMC and 14 TMC respectively</p>
<p>Estimated utilisation of water</p> <p>322.73 tmc</p>	<p>■ Odisha and Chhattisgarh can utilise 5 TMC and 1.5 TMC of water respectively from the backwaters</p>

- Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Odisha had entered into an agreement** dated April 2, 1980, where the project was to be executed by Andhra Pradesh.
- As per Andhra Pradesh State Reorganisation Act (APRA), 2014, the **Polavaram Irrigation Project was declared as a National Project**. As per the Act the **Central Government shall execute the project** and obtain all requisite clearances including environmental, forests, and rehabilitation and resettlement norms.

OBJECTION RAISED BY ODISHA

- Odisha in 2016 submitted to the National Commission for Scheduled Tribes (NCST) that the project was **going to submerge** 7,656 hectares of land, including forestland, and displace more than 6,800 people including 5,916 tribals in Malkangiri district.
- **Though no comprehensive study has been carried out with regards to the likely submergence of the Malkangiri district due to the Polavaram project.**

Steps taken by Ministry of Jal Shakti

- The Ministry said that by providing remedial measures such as constructing **protective embankments** along Sileru and Sabari River in Odisha, and along Sabari River in Chhattisgarh, the submergence in both Odisha and Chhattisgarh could be avoided completely.
- The Ministry has asked the State Pollution Control Boards of Odisha and Chhattisgarh to **conduct a public hearing** for the construction of embankments without further loss of time.
- The Odisha had earlier expressed its reservation stating that the construction of an embankment **requires the**

diversion of forestland and **creates flooding** in Odisha territory.

INDIA'S CRITICALLY ENDANGERED SPECIES

#BIODIVERSITY

PRIMARY
SOURCE

THE HINDU

*World Wildlife Conservation Day (December 4) serves as an occasion to not only celebrate India's rich biodiversity but also evaluate **if enough is being done to protect the critically endangered species in the country.***

INDIA'S RICH BIODIVERSITY

- Despite having only **about 2.4% of the world's total land surface**, India has **10 biogeographic zones** and is home to **7-8% of all recorded species** (45,000 species of plants and 91,000 of animals). They include-
 - **8.58%** of the documented **mammalian species**.
 - 13.66% avian species
 - 7.91% reptiles
 - 4.66% amphibians
 - 11.72% fish and
 - 11.8% plants.
- **Four of the 34 globally identified biodiversity hotspots** are located in India namely,
 - Himalayas
 - Indo-Burma
 - Western Ghats-Sri Lanka
 - Sundaland (Includes Nicobar group of Islands).

NEED FOR CONSERVATION OF SPECIES

- Anthropogenic activities such as deforestation, mining, urbanisation, and agriculture encroach upon the wildlife habitat. This makes many species **susceptible to extinction**, due to:
 - Habitat loss and fragmentation
 - Poaching and hunting
 - Human-wildlife conflict
 - Impact of climate change
- Conservation of species is not only a moral obligation but also critical to restore ecological balance.

Critically Endangered Species in India:

- **International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN)** classifies species as critically endangered when they are at the **highest risk of extinction** in the wild.
- As per the latest data (2022) from the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change, India has **73 species listed as "critically endangered"**. (The number has risen from 47 in 2011)

IMPORTANT SPECIES LISTED AS CRITICALLY ENDANGERED SPECIES

1. Endemic Mammals:

- Eight mammals listed as '**critically endangered**' are **endemic** to India (their habitat is limited to a small geographic area within India). They include-
 - **Kashmir Stag (Hangul)**: Found in Dachigam National Park, Jammu and Kashmir
 - **Namdapha Flying Squirrel**: Namdapha National Park at Arunachal Pradesh.
 - **Large Rock Rat (Elvira Rat)**: Endemic to Tamil Nadu
 - **Malabar Large-Spotted Civet**: Western Ghats
 - **Jenkin's Shrew** (small mole like animal): Western Ghats
 - **Nicobar Shrew**: Nicobar islands
 - **Andaman Shrew**: Andaman Islands
 - **Leafletted Leaf-Nosed Bat**: Found in isolated forest patches within India.

2. Birds:

- **Great Indian Bustard**: Rajasthan and Gujarat.
- **White-Bellied Heron**: Arunachal Pradesh and Bhutan foothills.
- **Sociable Lapwing**: Found in parts of Rajasthan during migration.
- **Himalayan Quail**: Last reported in Uttarakhand

3. Reptiles:

- **Gharial**: River systems of Northern India (Chambal River).
- **Red-Crowned Roofed Turtle**: Ganga River.
- **Golden Gecko**: Eastern Ghats.

4. Fish:

- **Ganges Shark**: Ganga and Brahmaputra river systems.
- **Deccan Mahseer**: Endemic to the rivers of the Deccan plateau.

5. Plants:

- **Malabar Lily:** Kerala and Tamil Nadu
- **Rafflesia:** Arunachal Pradesh
- **Kashmir Valley Tulip:** Jammu and Kashmir.

GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES FOR PROTECTION OF SPECIES

- **Key legislations:**
 - **Wildlife Protection Act, 1972:** Prohibits hunting and provides the legal framework for wildlife conservation.
 - **Wildlife reserves and sanctuaries** in India are set up to conserve certain endangered species.
 - Ban on hunting as a recreational sport in India.
 - **Environment Protection Act, 1986** is an umbrella legislation for environmental protection.
- **Flagship Animal Conservation Programs (E.g., Project Tiger, Project Elephant).**
- **Integrated Development of Wildlife Habitats:** Supports the recovery of species such as the Hangul and Great Indian Bustard.
- **International Collaborations:**
 - **CITES:** Regulates international trade in endangered plants and animals. (India is a party to CITES)
 - **UN Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), 1992:** global agreement on conservation of biodiversity.
- **Community involvement:** Promotion of community led-conservation projects and eco-tourism to protect biodiversity.

WAY FORWARD

- **Effective implementation** of existing laws (WPA 1972, CITES) and increased penalty for violations.
- **Increased monitoring** of species through satellite mapping and artificial intelligence surveillance systems to gather necessary data.
- **Habitat restoration**, expanding protected areas in wildlife corridors.
- **Planting of native tree** species in the restoration of degraded ecosystems.
- **Enhanced community participation** and increasing awareness campaigns about the endangered species in the society.
- **Cross border conservation** agreements to conserve biodiversity.

RATAPANI TIGER RESERVE

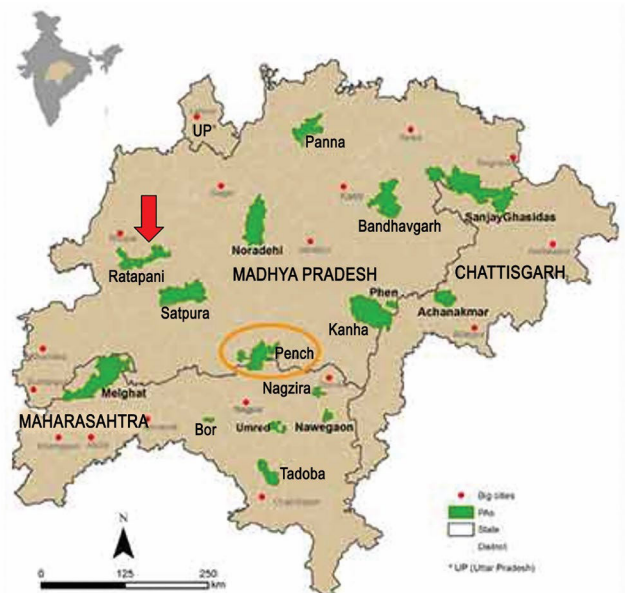
#CONSERVATION #TIGER RESERVE

PRIMARY SOURCE The Indian EXPRESS

Madhya Pradesh has notified **Ratapani forest** in Raisen district as a tiger reserve. It is the **eighth tiger reserve** in the state after Kanha, Satpura, Bandhavgarh, Pench, Sanjay Dubri, Panna and Veerangana Durgavati.

ABOUT RATAPANI TIGER RESERVE

- **Location:** Raisen district, Madhya Pradesh
- **Total area of RTR:** 1,271.465 sq km
- **Key geographical features:**
 - Located in the **Vindhya Range** in central India.
 - Dry deciduous and moist deciduous type forests, dominated by **Teak trees**.
 - **Major water bodies inside RTR:** Barna Reservoir and Ratapani Dam (Barrusot lake).
- **Key fauna:** Tiger, leopard, dhole, sambar, wild boar, sloth bear.
- **Bhimbetka rock shelters** are located within RTR.
 - These rock shelters have rock paintings of the Stone Age that are more than **30,000 years old**.
 - It has been declared a **World Heritage Site by UNESCO**.



WHAT ARE TIGER RESERVES?

- Tiger reserves are legally declared **protected areas** designated to **conserve tigers and their habitats**.

- The tiger reserves were set up as a part of **Project Tiger** initiated in 1973.
- They are administered by the **National Tiger Conservation Authority**.
 - As of December 2024, there are 57 tiger reserves in India.
- The **tiger reserves** are constituted on a **core/buffer strategy**.
 - **Core areas** have the legal status of a National Park or a Sanctuary.
 - **Buffer or peripheral areas** are a mix of forest and non-forest land, managed as a multiple use area.

WHO NOTIFIES TIGER RESERVES?

- Tiger Reserves are notified by State Governments as per provisions of the **Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972** on advice of the **National Tiger Conservation Authority**.
- The following steps are involved in the notification:
 - State Government identifies potential areas and submits a proposal to NTCA.
 - NTCA reviews the proposal. After thorough evaluation, NTCA recommends the proposal.
 - State Government notifies the area as a Tiger Reserve.
- With the formation of the tiger reserve, **NTCA provides funds** for the management of Tiger Reserve.

KEY FACTS ABOUT TIGER

- Tiger is an **umbrella species**. Its conservation automatically ensures the conservation of a large number of flora and fauna and entire ecosystems.
- India is home to 75% of the **global tiger population**.
 - NTCA conducts a tiger census across India **every 4 years**.
 - As per the latest Tiger Census Report (2022), India has **3682** tigers. (2967 in 2018)
 - **Madhya Pradesh** has the **highest number of tigers** (785), followed by Karnataka (563) and Uttarakhand (560).
- **Conservation status:**
 - **IUCN Red List:** Endangered
 - **Wildlife Protection Act:** Schedule 1
 - **CITES:** Appendix 1

INDIAN STAR TORTOISE

#IMPORTANT SPECIES

PRIMARY SOURCE THE HINDU

Researchers have identified **two genetically distinct groups** of the **Indian Star Tortoise**. They have suggested releasing captivated tortoises in different geographical areas **based on their divergences**. Unscientific releases could mix their population, depress their breeding rates and might lower their genetic diversity.



ABOUT INDIAN STAR TORTOISE

- Indian star tortoises are **endemic** to the Indian subcontinent. They reside in arid pockets of **northwest India** (bordering Pakistan), South India, and Sri Lanka.
- **Features:**
 - **Appearance:** Obsidian shell and striking sun-yellow star patterns adorning it.
 - **Sexual dimorphism:** Adult females are considerably larger than males.
 - Can grow up to 10 inches long.
- **Behaviour:** Mostly Herbivores.
- **Conservation Status:**
 - **CITES:** Appendix I.
 - **IUCN Status:** Vulnerable.
 - **Wildlife (Protection) Act 1972:** Schedule I
 - It is **illegal** to own one in India and unethical since they are vulnerable in the wild.
- **Concerns:**
 - **Rise in wildlife trafficking** due to increased global demand as pets (US, Canada, etc.)

- **Habitat fragmentation**, extremely susceptible to **parasites and diseases** (pneumonia and respiratory diseases).

TOXINS OF BHOPAL GAS TRAGEDY 1984

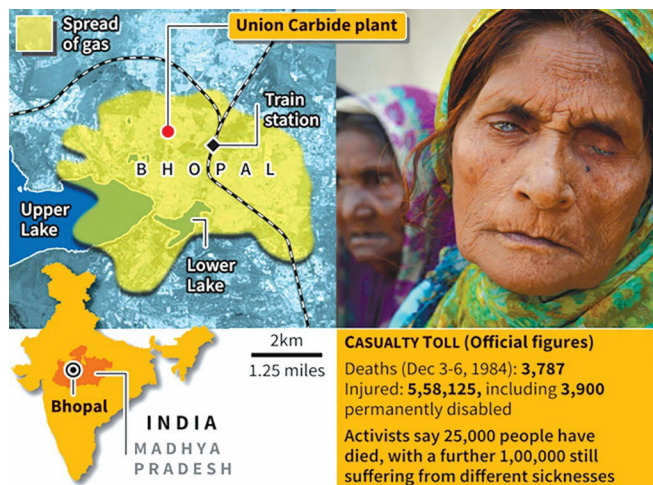
#INDUSTRIAL DISASTER

PRIMARY SOURCE THE HINDU

Forty years after the Bhopal disaster on December 2-3, 1984, several hundred tonnes of toxic waste still remain around the Union Carbide plant.

BHOPAL GAS TRAGEDY

- The Bhopal disaster or Bhopal gas tragedy was a **chemical accident** on the night of 2-3 December 1984 at the **Union Carbide India Limited (UCIL) pesticide plant** in Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh.
- The world's worst industrial disaster occurred due to the **release of nearly 40 metric tons of methyl isocyanate (MIC)** from the plant.



TOXINS ASSOCIATED WITH BHOPAL GAS TRAGEDY:

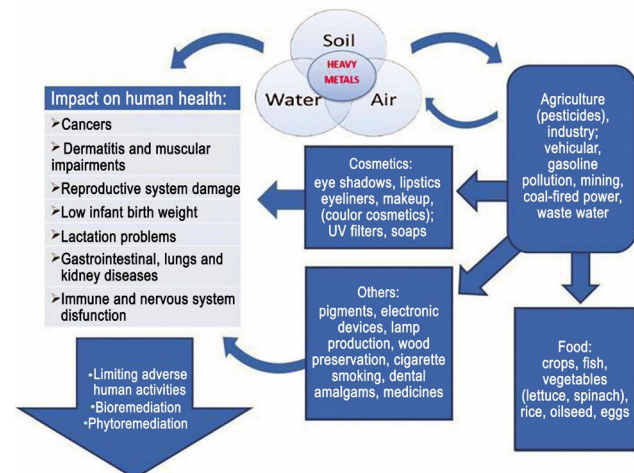
- Along with MIC, past reports have indicated the release of worrisome concentrations of toxins, persistent organic pollutants (POPs) and heavy metals.
 - **Toxins included:** Hexachlorobutadiene, Chloroform, Carbon tetrachloride, Trichlorobenzene
 - **Heavy metals:** Mercury, chromium, copper, nickel, and lead.

WHAT ARE PERSISTENT ORGANIC POLLUTANTS (POPS)?

- Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs) are **organic compounds that do not break down easily** and remain intact in the environment for long periods.
- They become widely distributed geographically, **accumulate in the fatty tissue** of living organisms and are **toxic to humans and wildlife**.
- **Their effects include-** Cancer, allergies and hypersensitivity, damage to the central and peripheral nervous systems, reproductive disorders, and disruption of the immune system.
- The **Stockholm Convention on POPs** is an **international environmental treaty** to protect human health and the environment from POPs.
 - The Convention was adopted in 2001 and came into effect in 2004.
 - India is a party to the Convention.

WHAT ARE HEAVY METALS?

- Heavy metals are a **group of metals and metalloids** that have relatively high densities, atomic weights, or atomic numbers. They are classified as heavy metals because their **density is at least 5x that of water**.
- They are often **characterised by their toxicity**, persistence in the environment, and **potential to bioaccumulate in living organisms** and have adverse effects on human health and the environment.



- **Common Examples:**
 - **Mercury:** Can damage multiple organs even at low concentrations by accumulating in soft tissue and preventing normal cellular function.
 - **Lead:**
 - Can damage chlorophyll and disrupt photosynthesis in plants.

- Developmental issues, brain impairment & cancer.
- **Arsenic:** Carcinogenic.
- **Chromium:** Carcinogenic, impair immune system.
- **Nickel:** Carcinogenic.

WHAT IS SILICOSIS?

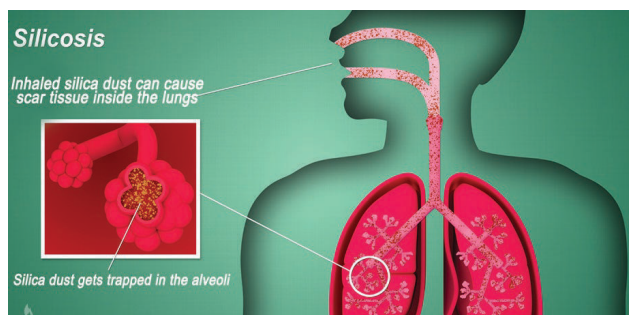
#POLLUTION

PRIMARY SOURCE THE HINDU

National Green Tribunal (NGT) directed the Central Pollution Control Board to draft new guidelines for granting permission for silica mining and washing plants and the Uttar Pradesh government and Pollution Control Board to set up health-care facilities in areas with silica mines.

WHAT IS SILICOSIS?

- Silicosis is a **long-term lung disease** caused by inhaling large amounts of crystalline silica dust.
 - Silica is a substance naturally found in certain types of stone, rock, sand and clay.
- **Impact:** Once inside the lungs, it causes swelling (inflammation) and gradually leads to hardened and **scarred lung tissue** (fibrosis). Lung tissue that is scarred in this way does not function properly.
- **Treatment:** There is **no cure for silicosis** because the lung damage can not be reversed. Treatment aims to relieve symptoms and improve quality of life.



WHICH INDUSTRIES ARE MORE VULNERABLE?

- Stone masonry and stone cutting – especially with sandstone
- Construction and demolition – as a result of exposure to concrete and paving materials
- Worktop manufacturing and fitting
- Pottery, ceramics and glass manufacturing
- Mining and quarrying

- Sand blasting

WHAT ARE VARIOUS CHALLENGES FACED BY INDIA IN THIS REGARD?

- Silicosis is a **common occupational disorder** seen all over India, particularly in the Central and Western States. It is an important cause of respiratory morbidity.
- Majority of silicosis cases are anticipated to be reported in **smaller units and cottage industries**.
 - Small enterprises may also be exempt from the statutory norms outlined in the **Factories Act, 1948**, and the **Mines Act, 1952**.
 - Operators do not follow occupational **Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code 2020** which require mine workers' employers to notify threats of bodily harm to workers and workers developing specific diseases, including silicosis.
- **Lack of data** with the government prevents them from taking actions.
- **Lack of standardised diagnostic algorithms** and guidelines for silicosis certification.
- **Misdiagnosis** also happens many times, confusing it with tuberculosis.

CARBON MARKET AND ITS WORKING

#CLIMATE CHANGE #FINANCIAL INTERVENTIONS

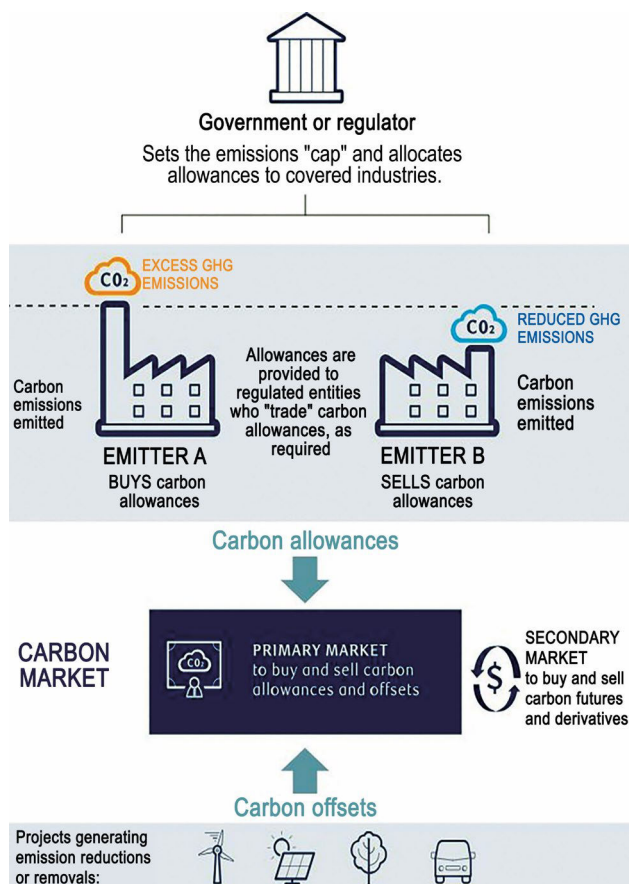
PRIMARY SOURCE THE HINDU

COP 29 in Baku, Azerbaijan has given a fillip to the idea of using carbon markets to curb the carbon emissions by approving standards that can help in the setting up of an International carbon market in near future.

MAJOR HIGHLIGHTS

- **Carbon Market** is a market that allows the trade of 'right to emit carbon' in the atmosphere.
 - **Illustration:** A government focusing on controlling emission will issue limited carbon credits to firms. Each carbon credit is equivalent to 1,000 Kgs of carbon dioxide. Firms/individuals who do not need carbon credit can trade them with interested buyers.
 - Price of carbon credit will be **market based i.e.,** will work on the principle of demand and supply.

- **Carbon Offset:** These are the alternatives to carbon credit, sold by environmental NGO to bridge the gap of credit and actual emission.
 - In case a business pollutes more than carbon credit and fails to secure them from other firms they can opt for this option.
 - For example, Firm A breaches the credit limit and can buy carbon offsets from NGO planting trees.



BENEFITS OF CARBON MARKET

- **Cost effective emission reduction** by limiting the emission with the help of imposing cost on polluters.
- **Promotes polluter pay principle** by enhancing compliance burden on individuals and firms.
- **Incentivise the compliance:** The Cap and trade system enforces limits on emissions, motivating organisations to stay within their allowances or invest in credit.
- **Pushes green funding** for environmental NGO and organisations by the mechanism of **carbon offset mechanism**.

ISSUES IN CARBON MARKET SYSTEM:

- **Discriminatory in nature** as carbon credit and carbon market mechanism paves way for the excess emission by wealthy developed nations.
- **Greenwashing** risk is associated with it as the polluter pay principle will provide unrestrained right to pollute.
- **Overestimation** of the impact, as the projects may exaggerate their carbon reduction impact.
- **Risk of market saturation:** The oversupply of the carbon credits and offset clause combined, can reduce the value of carbon credits that can hamper the reduction targets.

MARINE CARBON DIOXIDE REMOVAL

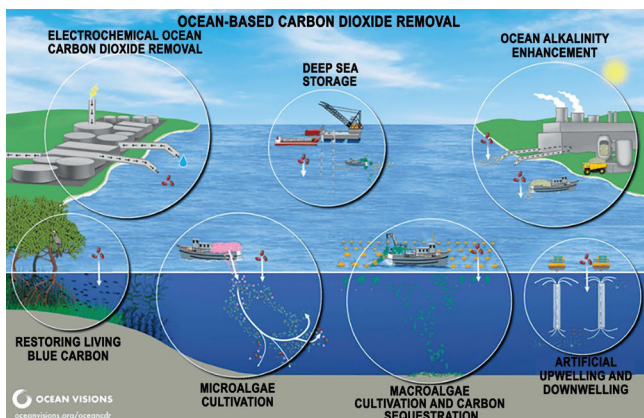
#CLIMATE CHANGE

PRIMARY SOURCE THE HINDU

Majority of the efforts to fight climate change have been **land-biased**. The countries have invested heavily on land but **underutilised** the potential of oceans, seas, lakes, and rivers for carbon dioxide removal.

WHAT IS MARINE CARBON DIOXIDE REMOVAL?

- Marine Carbon Dioxide Removal (mCDR) is any ocean-based process or technique designed to **remove carbon dioxide from the atmosphere** and **store it for long periods of time in the ocean**.
- Marine carbon capture strategies fall into two categories.
 - **Biotic approaches:** Taking advantage of living systems like mangroves and macro-algae of our rivers to carefully calibrate biomass burial at sea.
 - **Abiotic approaches:** Manipulating physical or chemical properties, such as through ocean alkalinity enhancement (OAE), which are relatively more complicated.
- **Other examples:** Adding alkaline materials to the ocean to increase the amount of carbon stored in ocean waters; adding iron or other nutrients to ocean waters to increase phytoplankton growth and export of carbon to the deep ocean; and sinking organic materials, such as kelp or crop residue, into the deep ocean.



WHY SHOULD OCEANS BE FOCUSSED?

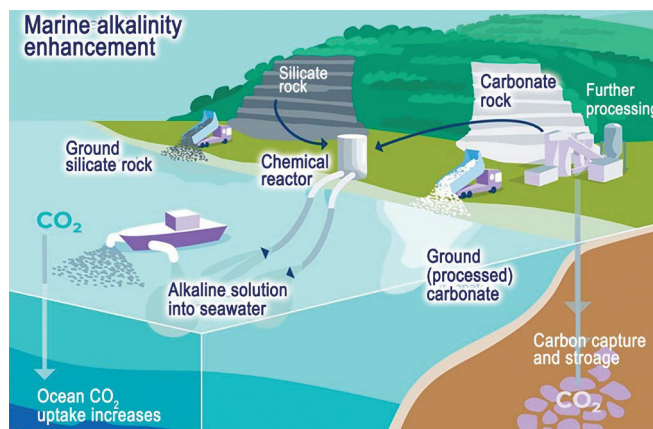
- **Land saturation:** Soils and rocks are so severely damaged that they no longer support efficient carbon capture. Land resources are also under severe pressure to support a huge population, agriculture, infrastructure etc.
- **Huge potential of Oceans:** Sea and oceans have **large surface areas** (cover over 70% of the Earth's surface), thus better suited for CO₂ absorption and removal.

WHAT IS OCEAN ALKALINITY ENHANCEMENT (OAE)?

- Ocean alkalization is an approach to carbon removal that involves **adding alkaline substances** to seawater to **enhance the ocean's natural carbon sink**.
- **How is it done?**
 - **Adding alkaline and/or basic solutions directly into seawater** – using electrochemical methods to split ocean water into its acidic and basic components and then returning the basic components again to the ocean.
 - **Adding certain types of mined alkaline minerals**, such as olivine, to coastal and ocean waters.
- **Mechanism:**
 - Adding alkalinity to seawater (or removing acid from seawater) would lead to a temporary elevation in seawater pH.
 - This then results in a series of chemical reactions that convert dissolved carbon dioxide (already present in the seawater) into dissolved inorganic carbon, primarily in the form of bicarbonate (relatively stable form of carbon).
 - The seawater (now depleted in dissolved carbon dioxide) then takes up additional carbon dioxide from the atmosphere at the ocean surface.

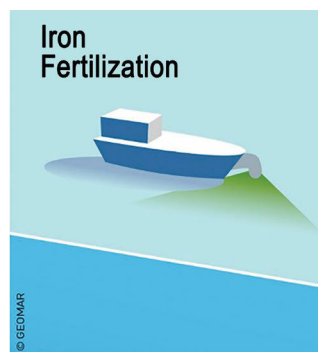
• Merits of OAE:

- Long-term storage of carbon in the form of stable **bicarbonate ions**.
- Provides the co-benefit of **locally mitigating ocean acidification**.
- Potential to **enhance fisheries production**.

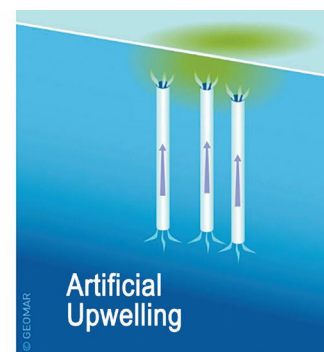


WHAT IS OCEAN FERTILIZATION?

- Ocean fertilization is a form of geoengineering that involves **adding nutrients to the upper (sunlit) layers of the ocean** to stimulate phytoplankton activity (photosynthesis) in an attempt to **draw down atmospheric CO₂ levels**.
 - The transfer of carbon from the surface ocean to the deep ocean must result in a subsequent transfer of carbon from the atmosphere into the surface ocean.
- This could be accomplished by **adding nutrients, such as iron**, to the open oceans or nutrients may be moved from the deep ocean to the surface ocean through a process called **"artificial upwelling."**
- Ocean fertilization does not include conventional aquaculture, mariculture or the creation of artificial reefs.



Ocean fertilization would involve adding nutrients, such as iron, to the surface waters to increase phytoplankton growth. Image courtesy of Rita Erven, GEOMAR



Artificial upwelling is a proposed mCDR method that involves moving nutrients from the deep ocean to the surface. Image courtesy of Rita Erven, GEOMAR.

WHAT IS DEEP OCEAN BIOMASS SINKING?

- Deep ocean biomass sinking is the **process of extracting carbon dioxide** from the atmosphere **through sinking carbon-rich biomass** into the deep oceans.
 - Plants on land and in the ocean pull in carbon dioxide from their environment during photosynthesis.
 - The carbon contained in terrestrial or marine biomass, such as crops or macroalgae, could potentially be sequestered from the atmosphere for long periods of time by **sinking it in the deep ocean**.



ACTIVE UNDERWATER HOT SPRING IN SOUTHERN INDIAN OCEAN

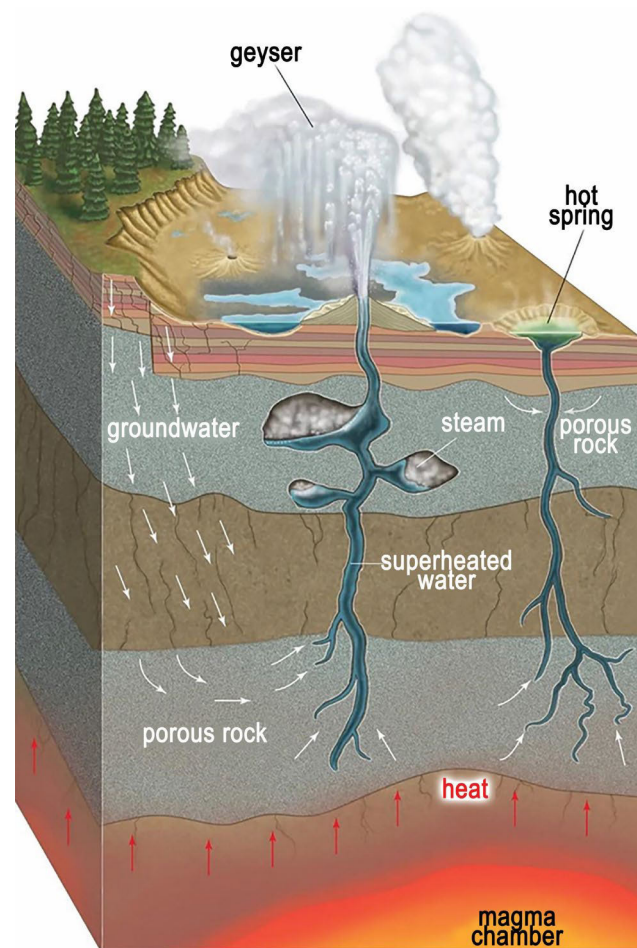
#GEOGRAPHICAL FEATURES

PRIMARY SOURCE *The Indian EXPRESS*

Indian oceanographers have captured the **image of an active hydrothermal vent** located 4,500 metres below the surface of the **Indian Ocean**. This site holds potential for mineral exploration as part of the Rs 4,000-crore **Deep Ocean Mission** under the Ministry of Earth Sciences.

WHAT ARE HYDROTHERMAL VENTS?

- **Hydrothermal vents** (largely found near tectonic plates) are **underwater springs** where cold water (about 2 degrees Celsius) prevailing near the seabed comes in close contact with magma (molten rock formed in very hot conditions inside the earth) in a tectonically active region.
- When this cold water trickles through cracks and fissures on the ocean crust and admixtures with magma, it **gets heated up**. It can turn into superhot water (up to 370 degrees Celsius) and later **emerge as plumes**, rich in minerals and gases, through chimneys and vents.



2011 Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc.

KEY FACTS

- **Location:** Hydrothermal vents in the deep ocean typically form along the mid-ocean ridges, such as the **East Pacific Rise** and the **Mid-Atlantic Ridge**. These are locations where two tectonic plates are diverging and a new crust is being formed.
- **Hydrothermal vents** could **remain active** from a few hundred years to as long as 30,000 years.

SIGNIFICANCE

- **Economic significance:** The deposits from hydrothermal venting are generally rich in **copper, zinc, gold, silver, platinum, iron, cobalt, nickel** and other economically-beneficial minerals and metals. This discovery could significantly **enhance India's Deep Ocean mission** focusing on **mineral exploration** from inactive vents.
- **Biological significance:** The vents may contain living **chemosynthetic organisms** (underwater microbes rely on chemicals enriched with minerals and metals for their sustenance). The discovery could offer better

insights into the **organisms that inhabit environments** supported by hydrothermal vents.

LA NINA

#GEOPHYSICAL PHENOMENON

PRIMARY
SOURCE

BusinessLine

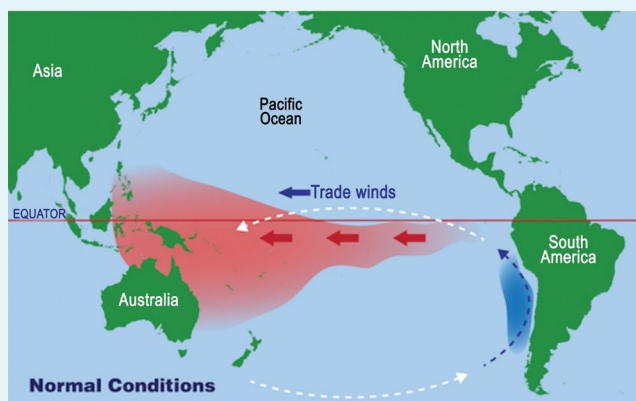
As per the World Meteorological Organisation (WMO), La-Nina weather, which brings heavy rain and floods to India, may develop in the next three months but it is expected to be relatively weak and short-lived.

WHAT IS LA - NINA?

- It basically refers to an **abnormal cooling of the central and eastern Pacific Ocean waters off the coasts of Ecuador and Peru.**
- Such cooling (sea surface temperatures i.e. SSTs falling) is a **result of strong trade winds** blowing west along the equator, taking warm water from South America towards Asia.
- **The warming of the western equatorial Pacific, then, leads to increased evaporation and concentrated cloud-formation activity around that region,** whose effects may spread to India as well.

NORMAL CONDITION

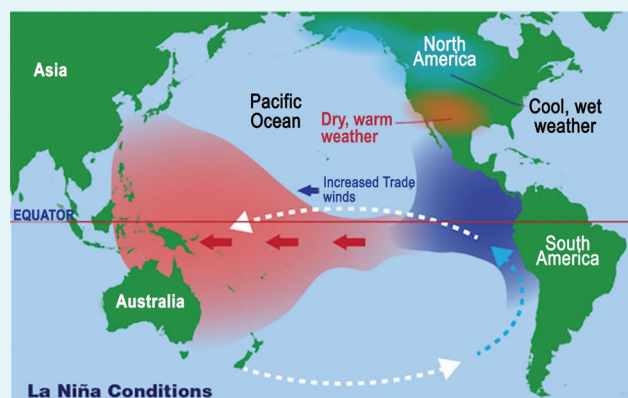
- Winds along the equator push warm water westward (from South America to Indonesia). As the warm water moves west, cold water from the deep rises up to the surface (on the coast of South America).



La Niña year:

- Stronger than usual winds makes the water in the Pacific Ocean near the equator a few degrees colder. La Niña blows warm water to the western Pacific. This

means that places like Indonesia and Australia can get much more rain than usual.



IMPACT OF LA NINA IN INDIA

- La Nina events usually lead to **warming of the Indian Ocean**, particularly the Western Indian Ocean region due to changes in wind patterns. This also leads to **reduced upwelling in the region leading to reduced fisheries catch.**
- **Monsoon Enhancement:** Usually La Niña events lead to strengthening of monsoons in India leading to more rainfalls.
- **Boost for Agriculture:** An enhanced monsoon can benefit agriculture, especially in regions where rainfed agriculture is practiced.
- **Flood Risks:** Increased rainfall can also result in flooding events in low-lying areas leading to damage to life & property.
- **Winter Temperatures:** During La Niña years, northern India may experience colder winters. This is due to a stronger high-pressure system over Central Asia, which can bring cold winds down into the northern plains of India.
- **Drought Mitigation:** La Niña conditions can help alleviate drought situations in regions experiencing water scarcity, as the increased rainfall can replenish reservoirs, rivers, and groundwater levels.

LAKE SNOW EFFECT

#PHYSICAL PHENOMENON

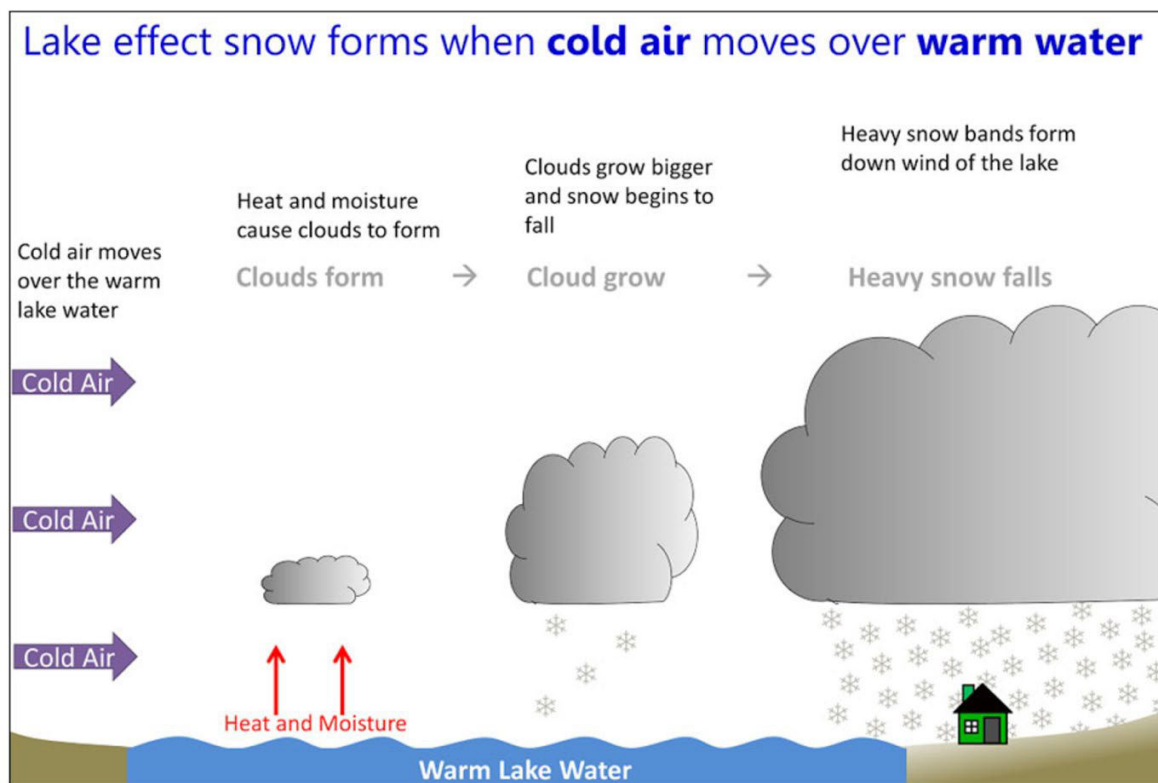
PRIMARY
SOURCE

BusinessLine

Several states in the US are witnessing snowfall as a result of the '**Lake Snow Effect.**'

WHAT IS THE LAKE SNOW EFFECT?

- It is a **localised weather phenomenon** where **heavy snowfall occurs near large bodies of water**.
- It is mostly witnessed near the Great Lakes in **North America**, during colder months.
- **Mechanism:**
 - The cold air (often originating from Canada) moves over the warmer surface of the lakes.
 - The lower layer of the air is warmed by the lake's surface and picks up water vapour from the lakes, and rises through colder air.
 - The warm, moist air rises into the colder atmosphere above. Rapid cooling causes the moisture to condense, forming clouds.
 - The clouds grow into a narrow band that **results in heavy snowfall**, often producing 2–3 inches or more per hour.



SANTA ANA WINDS DRIVE WILDFIRE

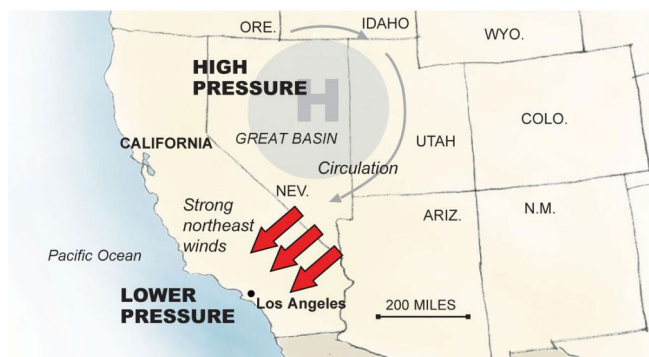
#CLIMATE CHANGE #WILDFIRES

PRIMARY SOURCE *The Indian EXPRESS*

The coastal town of Malibu in California, the US is presently gripped in wildfires attributed to two major reasons- Santa Ana winds and Climate change.

WHAT ARE SANTA ANA WINDS?

- Santa Anas are dry, warm (often hot) local winds that blow westward through **Southern California**, toward the coast.
- The winds are usually seasonal, and typically occur between October and March and peak in December.
- Santa Ana winds are driven by differences in the atmospheric pressure.
 - Santa Ana winds blow when **high pressure builds** over the **Great Basin** (area between the Rocky Mountains and Sierra Nevada) and the **pressure is low over California's coast**.
 - The difference in pressure triggers the movement of powerful winds from the Basin's inland deserts, east and north of Southern California, over the mountains toward the Pacific Ocean.
 - As they flow downwards and cross deserts, they become very dry, warm, and gain speed.
- **Impact:** The **lack of humidity** in Santa Ana winds **dries out vegetation**, making it highly inflammable. The wind also fan the flames and help spread them.



ROLE OF CLIMATE CHANGE

- Wildfire season in California has **lengthened in recent years** in the past two decades and the yearly peak has shifted from August to July.
- The wildfires have also **become more intense** in the past few years. Five of the 10 largest California wildfires (over 20 years) occurred in 2020 alone.

CHAMPIONS OF THE EARTH AWARD 2024

#AWARDS AND HONOURS

PRIMARY
SOURCE The Indian
EXPRESS

Veteran ecologist **Madhav Gadgil** has received the **UN's highest environmental honour** — the '**Champions of the Earth**' Award — for 2024.

CHAMPIONS OF THE EARTH AWARD

- Champions of the Earth is the **highest UN honour** in the field of environment.
- It is awarded to outstanding figures from the **public sector, private sector** and **civil society**, whose actions have brought a positive impact and transformation on the environment.
- The award is **presented in five categories**: Lifetime Achievement, Policy Leadership, Action and Inspiration, Entrepreneurial Vision and Science & Innovation.
- Awarded by**: United Nations Environment Program.
- Launched in**: 2005

ABOUT MADHAV GADGIL

- Madhav Gadgil is a prominent **Indian Ecologist** with notable contributions to environmental conservation efforts in India.

- He is a recipient of **Padma Bhushan** and Tyler Prize for Environmental Achievement.
- His early research helped in the **identification of the Nilgiris** as the **first biosphere reserve in India**.
- He is one of the architects of **India's Biological Diversity Act** and was involved in the implementation of the **Forest Rights Act**.
- He was the chairman of the **Western Ghats Ecology Expert Panel** or the **Gadgil Commission**, which submitted a report (Gadgil Committee Report) in 2011.
 - The report marked around **64% of the Western Ghats region** as an Ecologically Sensitive Area (ESA).
- He has emphasised the **role of local communities** (locals, indigenous populations and gram Sabhas) in protecting the environment.

GADGIL REPORT	KASTURIRANGAN REPORT
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recommended that the entire stretch of the Western Ghats should be declared an Ecologically Sensitive Area (ESA) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Divided the Western Ghats into two: natural landscape and cultural landscape
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It divided the region into three zones - ESZ1, ESZ2 & ESZ3 - and gave a broad outline of certain restrictions for each zone 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Of the natural landscape, it picked out merely 37% as "biologically rich" and "with some measure of contiguity." Any restrictions were only placed in this area
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It recommended the determination of an area as ESZ1 or ESZ2 or ESZ3 be done at the block/taluka level 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It proposed the demarcation of ESA be done at the village level
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No new polluting industries (red and orange category) were to be permitted in ESZ1 & ESZ2. Existing industries were to be phased out by 2016 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Only red category industries (heavily polluting such as mining) were completely restricted

PRACTICE QUESTIONS

MCQS

Q1. 'Gadgil Committee Report' and 'Kasturirangan Committee Report', sometimes seen in the news, are related to:

- (a) Constitutional reforms
- (b) Ganga Action Plan
- (c) Linking of rivers
- (d) Protection of Western Ghats

Q2. Consider the following statements:

- 1. Sacred grooves are artificial vegetation developed as the repository of plants of medicinal values.
- 2. They are mainly developed in the western ghats of India.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 only
- (b) 2 only
- (c) Both 1 and 2
- (d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q3. With reference to Polavaram Project, consider the following statements:

- 1. Godavari-Krishna river inter-linking will be implemented as part of this project.
- 2. It is a multipurpose under construction project on the river Krishna.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 only
- (b) 2 only
- (c) Both 1 and 2
- (d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q4. Consider the following statements with reference to the 'Lake Snow Effect':

- 1. The phenomenon occurs when warm air moves over colder lakes in the Arctic region.
- 2. The phenomenon is associated with the occurrence of heavy snowfall.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 only
- (b) 2 only
- (c) Both 1 and 2
- (d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q5. Which of the following are heavy metals?

- 1. Lead
- 2. Mercury
- 3. Hydrogen
- 4. Chromium
- 5. Helium

Select the correct code:

- (a) 1, 2 and 3 only
- (b) 2, 3 and 4 only
- (c) 1, 2 and 4 only
- (d) 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5

DESCRIPTIVE QUESTIONS

- Q1.** Despite having a framework for disaster financing under the Disaster Management Act, 2005, the states in India remain underfunded and vulnerable. Comment.
- Q2.** 'Carbon market is one of the many ways to control emissions.' In context of the statement, mention other means of emission reduction and analyse the carbon market's efficiency over those means.

Answers: 1-d, 2-d, 3-a, 4-b, 5-c

SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

GS PAPER (PRELIMS) & GS PAPER III (MAIN)

GENE THERAPY FOR HAEMOPHILIA

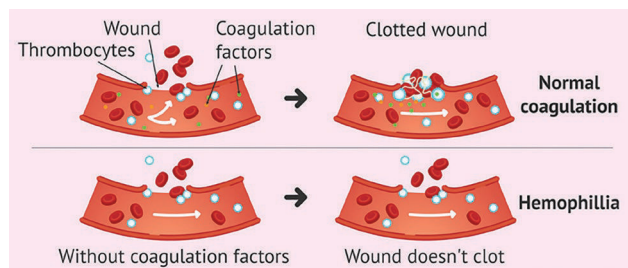
#BIOLOGY AND BIOTECHNOLOGY

PRIMARY SOURCE THE HINDU

Department of Biotechnology along with the Centre for Stem Cell Research, Vellore, Tamil Nadu has successfully executed a **first-in-human gene therapy** using **lentiviral vectors** to treat Haemophilia-A.

WHAT IS HAEMOPHILIA?

- **Haemophilia:** Rare genetic **severe bleeding disorder** caused by **deficiency** of clotting Factor VIII (proteins in blood that help it clot), leading to spontaneous internal and external bleeding, even after a minor injury.
- **Occurrence:** It is an **X-chromosome linked recessive disorder**, i.e., more common in males than females. Females can carry haemophilia genes, but they usually do not have symptoms unless they have two copies of the gene, one from each parent.
- **Treatment:** A **lifelong condition** with no permanent cure. Current treatments involve **frequent Factor VIII replacement therapy** (to replace deficient clotting factor).
- India bears the **world's second-largest burden** of Haemophilia.



MECHANISM USED IN THE LATEST GENE THERAPY TO TREAT HAEMOPHILIA

- The gene therapy approach uses a **lentiviral vector** to **introduce a normal copy** of the **Factor VIII gene** into **autologous haematopoietic stem cells (HSCs)**.

- Lentiviral vectors are a **type of viral vector** that can be used to **transfer genetic material into cells** for gene therapy.

- These modified HSCs **generate blood cells capable of producing functional Factor VIII** over extended periods, thus terminating the need for repeated infusions.

WHAT IS GENE THERAPY?

- **Gene therapy:** Technique that seeks to **modify or manipulate the expression of a gene** or to **alter the biological properties of living cells** to cure disease.
- Gene therapies can work by **several mechanisms**:
 - Inactivating a disease-causing gene that is not functioning properly.
 - Replacing a disease-causing gene with a healthy copy of the gene.
 - Introducing a new or modified gene into the body to help treat a disease.

MODES OF GENE THERAPY

- **Germline Gene Therapy:** Involves **modifying genes in reproductive cells** (sperm or egg). The changes would be passed onto future generations. Gene editing of embryonic cells is **banned** across the world (and in India by ICMR Guidelines 2019).
- **Somatic Gene Therapy:** Involves **modifying genes in any cell other than a reproductive cell**. Changes only affect the treated individual and are not inherited by their offspring.

GENE THERAPY PRODUCTS (GTP)

- **GTP:** Biological substances designed to introduce genetic material into a patient's cells to treat or prevent a disease.
- **Key Components of GTP:**
 - **Therapeutic Gene:** This is the specific genetic material intended to treat the disease.
 - **Vector:** A carrier that delivers the therapeutic gene into the target cells. This can be a virus (viral vector) or a synthetic carrier (non-viral vector).

- **Other Components:** Depending on the specific product, additional components may be included, such as promoters, enhancers, or markers to optimise gene expression.

TYPES OF GENE THERAPY PRODUCTS

- **Plasmid DNA:** Circular DNA molecules can be genetically engineered to carry therapeutic genes into human cells.
- **Viral vectors:** Viruses are modified to remove their ability to cause infectious disease. Then these viruses can be used as vectors to carry therapeutic genes into human cells.
- **Bacterial vectors:** Bacteria can be modified to prevent them from causing infectious disease and then used as vectors to carry therapeutic genes into human tissues.
- **Patient-derived cellular gene therapy products:** Cells are removed from the patient, genetically modified (often using a viral vector) and then returned to the patient.

APPLICATIONS OF GENE THERAPY

- **Cardiovascular Diseases:** Treat conditions like heart failure, coronary artery disease, and arrhythmias.
- **Cancer:** Various approaches include, CAR T-cell therapy, tumour suppressor gene therapy, and oncolytic viruses.
- **Genetic Disorders:** To treat genetic diseases like cystic fibrosis, hemophilia, and muscular dystrophy by correcting the underlying genetic defect.
- **Neurological Disorders:** Treat conditions like Parkinson's disease, Alzheimer's disease, and spinal cord injuries.
- **Infectious Diseases:** Potential treatment for HIV/AIDS and other infectious diseases by enhancing immune response.

CHALLENGES INVOLVED IN GENE THERAPY

- **Delivery of genes:** Effectively getting the genetic material to the target cells can be difficult.
- **Immune response:** The body might reject the introduced genetic material.
- **Long-term effects:** The long-term consequences of gene therapy are still being studied.
- **Ethical Concerns:** Germline Gene Therapy raises significant ethical concerns (designer babies, unintended consequences on future generations) and is currently banned in many countries.

NATIONAL GUIDELINES FOR GENE THERAPY, 2019

- **Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR)** released National Guidelines for Gene Therapy Product Development and Clinical Trials in **2019** for advancement of gene therapy in India.
- **Scope:** Covers all aspects of gene therapy product development, from preclinical testing to clinical trials and post-market surveillance.
- **GTAEC:** Establishes Gene Therapy Advisory and Evaluation Committee (GTAEC) to oversee gene therapy activities.
- **Focus on Rare Diseases:** Aims to address the unmet needs of patients with rare genetic disorders.

IMMUNOTHERAPY FOR CANCER TREATMENT

#BIOLOGY AND BIOTECHNOLOGY #HEALTH

PRIMARY
SOURCE THE HINDU

Immunotherapy showcases significant advancement in cancer treatment technology.

WHAT IS CANCER?

- **Cancer:** uncontrolled cell growth and division in any part of the body.
- **Occurrence:** When some disruption in the DNA in a normal cell interferes with the cell's ability to regulate cell division.
- **Causes:** DNA disruption can be caused by mutation due to certain chemicals or sources of high energy (Sun, X-rays, Nuclear radiation), viral infections, certain environmental and lifestyle factors.

POTENTIAL OF IMMUNOTHERAPY FOR CANCER TREATMENT

Immunotherapy: Type of biological therapy that uses a person's own immune system to fight cancer. It works by helping the immune system recognise and attack cancer cells.

IMPORTANT TYPES OF IMMUNOTHERAPY FOR CANCER TREATMENT

1. CAR-T Cell Therapy:

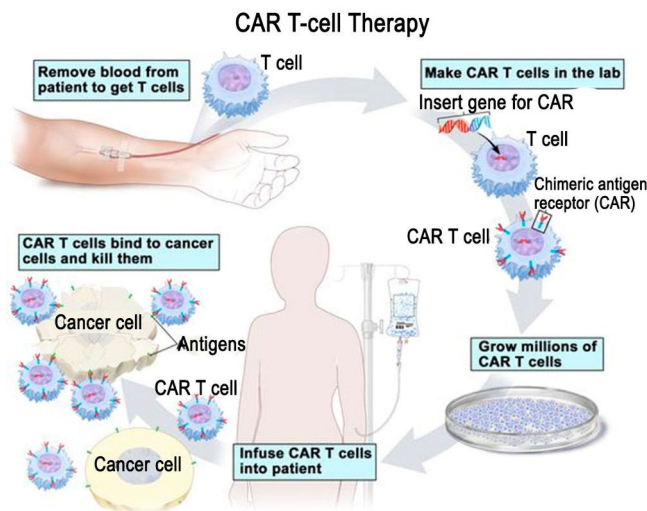
- **Chimeric antigen receptor (CAR) T-cell therapy:** Type of cell-based gene therapy which involves

altering the genes inside T-cells (a type of white blood cell) to help them attack cancer cells.

• **Mechanism:**

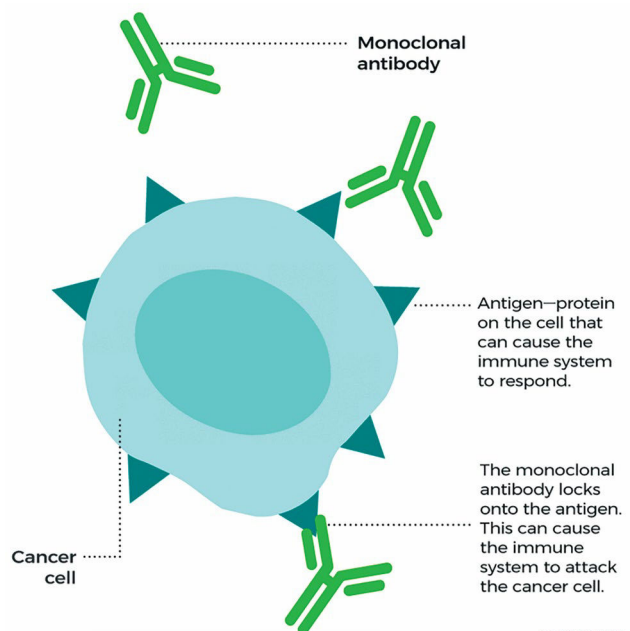
- In the therapy, **T-cells are harvested** from the patient's blood.
- These cells are modified in the laboratory to express specific proteins on their surface known as **chimeric antigen receptors (CAR)**.
- These cells are multiplied in the laboratory and then **inserted back** into the patient.
- This genetic modification allows **CAR T-cells to effectively bind to the cancer cells** and destroy them.

- **Approval:** CAR T-cell therapy has been **approved for leukaemia** (cancer arising from cells that produce WBCs) and **lymphoma** (arising from lymphatic system).



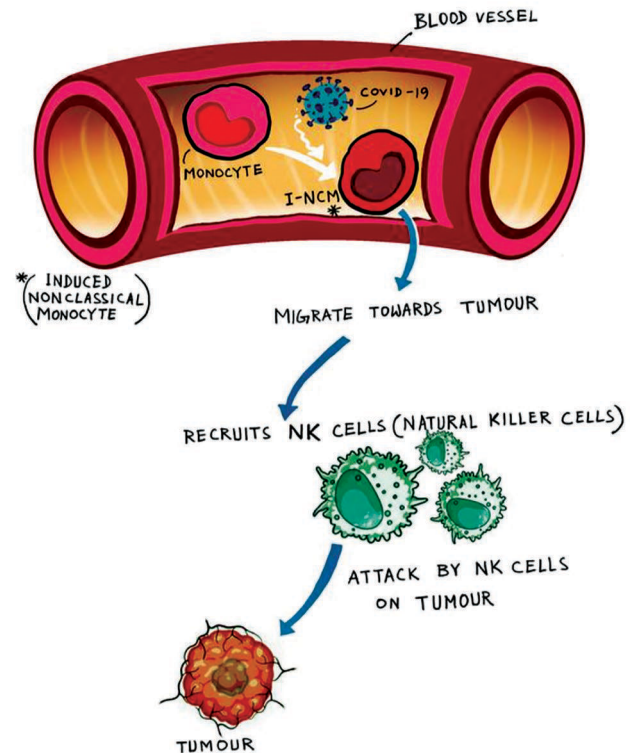
2. **Monoclonal Antibodies:**

- **Monoclonal antibodies:** Immune system proteins created in the lab (**artificial antibodies**) that are designed to **bind to specific targets** on cancer cells.
- The monoclonal antibodies **mark (flag) cancer cells**, so that they can be identified and destroyed by the **immune system**.



3. **Cancer vaccines/ Injecting induced non-classical monocytes (I-NCMs):**

- **Injecting a specific type of white blood cell (induced non-classical monocytes)** through cancer vaccines can combat cancer.



- These specialised WBCs (I-NCMs) can also be **generated/activated** through severe infections like **COVID-19** or by using certain chemicals.

- Once activated, I-NCMs leave the blood vessels and **migrate to tumours**, where they **launch an attack on cancer cells**.

Limitations: Not all cancers respond to immunotherapy, and even when treatments show initial success, cancer cells can adapt and develop resistance.

EXTRACHROMOSOMAL DNA

#BIOLOGY AND BIOTECHNOLOGY

PRIMARY
SOURCE THE HINDU

Recent studies suggest that **Extrachromosomal DNA (ecDNA)** is **present in nearly 40% of cancer cell lines** and in **up to 90% in patient-derived brain tumour samples**, revealing its pivotal role in cancer biology.

BACKGROUND: BASICS OF CELL AND DNA

- Each cell in the human body has **23 pairs of chromosomes** (46 total chromosomes). Chromosomes are thread-like structures **found in the nucleus** of cells and are made up of **DNA** and proteins.
- **DNA** (deoxyribonucleic acid) is a molecule **present in the nucleus of a cell** that carries **genetic information** in the form of genes. Genes encode a complete set of instructions for building and maintaining an organism.
- **Majority of DNA is found in the chromosomes** (nuclear DNA), however, DNA can also be found as:
 - extrachromosomal DNA (ecDNA)
 - mitochondria (mtDNA)
 - cell-free DNA (cfDNA)

WHAT IS EXTRACHROMOSOMAL DNA?

- **ecDNA:** Any DNA that is **found off the chromosomes** (either inside or outside the nucleus of a cell).
- **Formation of ecDNA:**
 - Some natural processes that can damage DNA. Cells can also make mistakes when making new copies of DNA. Such processes could cause **a small part of the DNA to break away from the main chromosome** and form a **circular structure** that floats freely inside the nucleus. This is ecDNA.

NEW RESEARCH RELATED TO ecDNA

- **Early observation:** ecDNA was discovered in cancer cells around 50 years ago. At that time, it was believed

to be present in **only 1.4% of tumours**, and so was ignored.

- **Later observation:** ecDNA is present in nearly **40% of cancer cell lines** and in **up to 90%** in patient-derived brain tumour samples.
- **ecDNA and Cancer growth:** ecDNA may **amplify oncogene expression** (oncogenes are mutated genes capable of causing cancer) and thus, lead to higher prevalence of Cancer.

IDIOPATHIC PULMONARY FIBROSIS

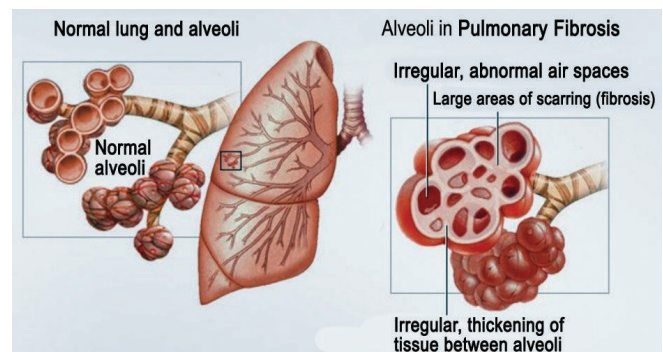
#BIOLOGY & BIOTECHNOLOGY #HEALTH

PRIMARY
SOURCE The Indian
EXPRESS

Recently, renowned musician **Ustad Zakir Hussain** passed away following complications with **idiopathic pulmonary fibrosis**.

WHAT IS IDIOPATHIC PULMONARY FIBROSIS?

- It is a chronic, progressive **lung disease** characterised by scarring (fibrosis) of lung tissue, leading to **irreversible loss of lung function**. Exact cause of IPF is **unknown**, so it is termed idiopathic.
- In a **healthy lung**, the oxygen easily passes through the walls of the air sacs (alveoli) and goes into the capillaries, and eventually bloodstream. In IPF, the fibrosis **thickens and stiffens the lungs**, reducing their ability to expand and take in oxygen.
 - IPF specifically targets **interstitium** (the tissue surrounding the air sacs). As a result, the **alveoli walls get thicker**, which makes it difficult for the oxygen to move into the bloodstream.
 - Over time, this leads to **persistent breathlessness, fatigue, and reduced quality of life**.



- **Symptoms:** Shortness of breath, prolonged dry cough, pain in joints and muscles, fatigue and weight loss.

RISK FACTORS FOR IPF

- **Age:** Older people (over age 50, generally 60-70).
- **Lifestyle:** Smoking, prolonged exposure to dust, wood, or metal particles.
- **Gender:** More common in men.
- **Genetic mutations** E.g., mutation in gene MUC5B (which makes a mucus protein that helps clear harmful substances, like bacteria, from lungs) increases the risk of IPF.

TREATMENT FOR IPF

- **No cure** for IPF, at present. Medicines and other treatments (oxygen therapy, ventilator support) can slow down lung damage. **Lung transplant** might be an option.

PROBA-3 MISSION

#ASTRONOMY AND SPACE TECHNOLOGY

PRIMARY
SOURCE The Indian
EXPRESS

Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) has successfully launched **PSLV-C59 mission** with **ESA's Proba-3 satellites**, from Satish Dhawan Space Centre, Sriharikota, Andhra Pradesh.

ABOUT PROBA-3 MISSION

- Proba-3 is the **world's first precision formation flying mission**, involving two satellites to be placed in a highly elliptical orbit that extends up to 60,000 km from Earth.
- **Aim:** To demonstrate **precision formation flying** between two satellites and study the Sun's corona (the outer layer of the Sun's atmosphere).
- **Launch vehicle:** **Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle-XL** (PSLV-XL)
- **Mission of:** European Space Agency.

KEY FEATURES

- Proba-3 has two satellites- **Coronagraph spacecraft** and the **Occulter spacecraft** flying in a **parallel formation** at distances of 144 metres from each other for six hours a day.
 - The satellites will demonstrate **Collision Avoidance Manoeuvre** to ensure they do not collide or run away from each other.

- The two satellites will work in tandem to **study the Sun's corona** and **measure its energy output** with unprecedented precision.
 - The Occulter will position itself between the **Coronagraph and the Sun, creating an artificial eclipse** (casting a shadow) over the Coronagraph's telescope.
 - The shadow blocks the Sun's direct light and **allows the Coronagraph to observe the Sun's faint corona**.
- The Occulter's continuous Sun-facing position makes it an ideal platform for additional scientific instruments. It consists of **Davos Absolute Radiometer (DARA)** which will provide continuous measurements of the Sun's total energy output (total solar irradiance).

PROBA-3: FORMATION FLYING DOUBLE SATELLITES



BENEFIT OF PRECISION FORMATION FLYING MISSION

- Instead of using a single satellite accommodating both Occulter and Coronagraph, they are placed on **two separate satellites** that will work in tandem. This ensures:
 - Instruments larger than those typically accommodated on a single satellite can be deployed.

- Scientists can observe fainter signals from smaller or more distant solar and astrophysical features, broadening the scope of space-based observations.

SIGNIFICANCE

- Provide new insights into:
 - **Sun's corona.**
 - **Origins of coronal mass ejections** (CMEs) and their impact on Earth's climate.
- **Measures total solar irradiance**, track changes in the Sun's energy output, long-term solar energy trends and their potential effects on our planet's climate.

PSLV-C60: SpaDeX & POEM

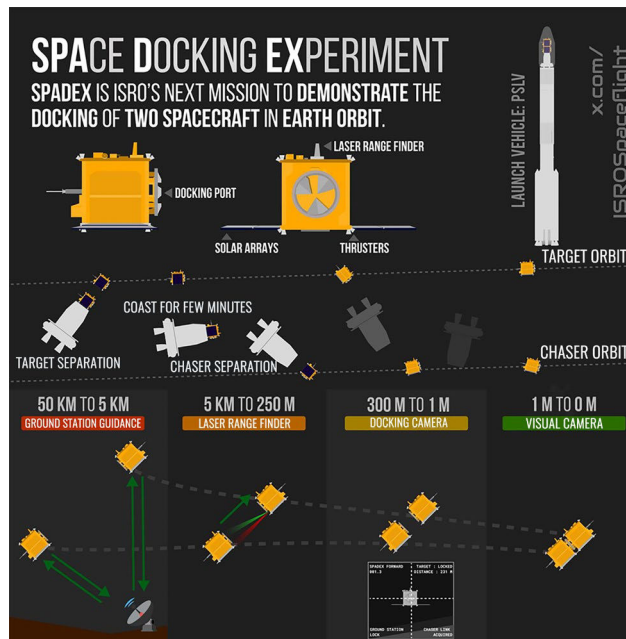
#ASTRONOMY AND SPACE TECHNOLOGY

PRIMARY
SOURCE THE HINDU

Indian Space Research Organisation's (ISRO) **PSLV-C60 mission** was launched on December 30, 2024.

OBJECTIVES

- **Aim:** To demonstrate the complex art of satellite docking in Space (in a low-Earth circular orbit) with the **Space Docking Experiment (SpaDeX).**
- **POEM 4.0:** The mission will leverage **PSLV's fourth stage** (POEM-4) to host 24 scientific experiments.



ABOUT SpaDeX

- **Space Docking Experiment** (SpaDeX) is a new indigenous space mission commissioned by **ISRO.**
- It is a cost-effective technology demonstrator mission for the **demonstration of in-space docking using two small spacecraft launched by PSLV.**
 - **Space docking** involves **precise connection** of two spacecraft, whether manned or unmanned, allowing those to operate as a single unit for critical tasks such as refuelling, repair, and crew exchange.
- The PSLV rocket **carries two satellites** named Chaser (SDX01) and Target (SDX02). Each weighs 220 kg. After launch and orbit insertion, the two satellites will **attempt to dock** at an altitude of **470 kilometers** above the Earth.

TECHNOLOGICAL HURDLES

Complex Docking Mechanisms | Aligning and connecting two spacecraft in orbit requires precise engineering to make the process safe and effective

Formation Flying | Successful docking requires sophisticated navigation and control systems to maintain the correct positions relative to each other

Autonomous Operations | It involves advanced algorithms and control systems to manage the approach, connection, and subsequent operations without human intervention

Communication Systems | Ensuring that data transfer remains stable and secure during these critical operations poses another layer of complexity

SIGNIFICANCE

- **Advancements in space docking technology:** Mastering in-space docking technology is essential for complex space missions that require assembling modules in space, satellite servicing etc.
 - Successful demonstration of the technology will make India the fourth country (after Russia, USA and China) in the world to have space docking technology.
- **Facilitation of future missions:** This technology is essential for India's space ambitions such as:
 - Preparing for the Gaganyaan human spaceflight program
 - Enabling Chandrayaan-4 lunar sample return missions
 - Developing the Bharatiya Antariksh Station (BAS), India's proposed space station.

PSLV ORBITAL EXPERIMENTAL MODULE (POEM)

- **Developed by:** Vikram Sarabhai Space Centre (VSSC).

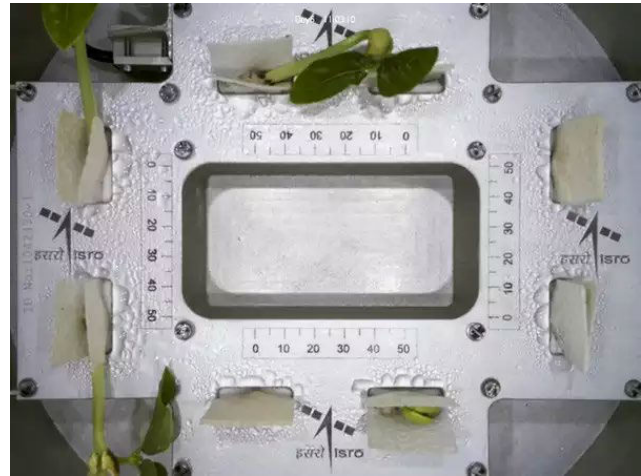
- POEM is an **experimental mission or space platform** to perform in-orbit experiments using the final (otherwise discarded) stage of ISRO's PSLV.
 - PSLV is a **four-stage rocket** where the first three spent stages fall back into the ocean, and the final stage (PS4) — after launching the satellite into orbit — often ends up as space junk.
 - In POEM, the spent final stage will be utilised as a **stabilised platform** to perform experiments.

POEM-4'S PAYLOADS

POEM-4 carries 24 payloads: 14 contributed by various ISRO centres and 10 by academia and private industry.

IMPORTANT PAYLOADS INCLUDE

- **Relocatable Robotic Manipulator-Technology Demonstrator**, a.k.a. 'Walking Robotic Arm,' to demonstrate a robotic arm that can move to defined targets on the POEM using an inchworm walking technique.
- **Debris Capture Robotic Manipulator** to capture tethered space debris with a robotic manipulator.
- **Compact Research module for Orbital Plant Studies (CROPS)** to study the germination and growth of eight cowpea seeds in a controlled environment.
- **Amity Plant Experimental Module in Space (APEMS)** payload to compare growth-related changes in plant callus cells using spinach plants in microgravity and earth gravity.
- **RVSat-1** payload to measure the growth of the gut bacterium in space. This will provide data to understand human physiology in space and astronaut health during crewed missions.
- **BGS Amateur Radio Payload for Information Transmission (ARPIT)**. It can transmit audio, text, and images from a satellite to the ground with frequency modulation in the VHF band. It is designed to provide amateur radio satellite services worldwide.
- **RUDRA 1.0 HPGP** will test a **green propulsion system** with a thrust of 1 newton and a specific impulse of 220 seconds.
- **VYOM 2U** will test a monopropellant as a safer and better performing **alternative to hydrazine** (the most widely used propellant in the Indian space programme at present). VYOM has a thrust of 1.1 N and a specific impulse greater than 250 seconds.



CROPS EXPERIMENT

- **Compact Research Module for Orbital Plant Studies (CROPS)** payload is developed by the **Vikram Sarabhai Space Centre**.
- CROPS functions as an **automated platform** designed to **cultivate** and **research seed germination and plant survival** in the microgravity environment of space.
 - Microgravity exists where there is a **negligible amount of gravity** or where objects are in **free fall**. E.g., Inside the International Space Station (ISS).
- **Eight cowpea seeds** are placed in a regulated **closed-box setting** with precise temperature control and **advanced monitoring equipment** to observe plant development continuously.
- **Success:** The batch of cowpea seeds have **sprouted** and **unveiled their first leaves**.
- **Significance:** Advances development of space agriculture, essential for self-sufficient space habitats.

PARKER SOLAR PROBE'S CLOSEST APPROACH TO SUN

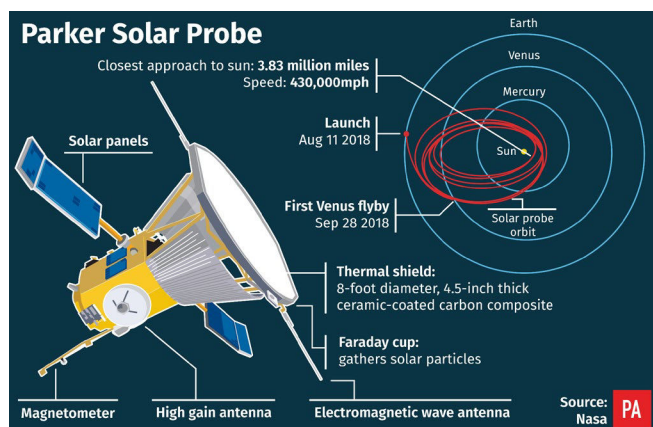
#ASTRONOMY AND SPACE TECHNOLOGY

PRIMARY SOURCE THE HINDU

NASA's **Parker Solar Probe** has just made history by completing its **closest pass to the Sun** than any spacecraft ever before.

MAJOR HIGHLIGHTS

- On 24 December 2024, the Parker Solar probe **made its closest approach to the Sun**, coming to a distance of **6.1 million km (0.04 AU)** from the surface.
 - Its beacon signal was received on 26 December, showing that it **had survived the passage through the corona** (survived the heat).
 - The spacecraft has become the **closest ever artificial object** to the Sun.
- Significance:** The flyby is a major step forward in understanding the Sun and its impact on our solar system.



ABOUT PARKER SOLAR PROBE

- Launched in **2018** to make **observations of the Sun's outer corona**.
- Mission of:** National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA).
- Aim:**

- Trace the flow of energy that heats the solar corona and accelerates the solar wind.
- Determine the structure and dynamics of the plasma and magnetic fields.
- Explore mechanisms that accelerate and transport energetic particles.
- The spacecraft's systems are protected from the extreme heat and radiation near the Sun by a **solar shield**.
 - The solar shield is mounted on the **Sun-facing side** of the spacecraft.
 - It is made from **reinforced carbon-carbon composite** with a carbon foam core.
 - It is designed to **withstand temperatures** outside the spacecraft of over 1370 °C.

SATELLITE INTERNET

#INTERNET AND COMMUNICATIONS TECHNOLOGY

PRIMARY
SOURCE

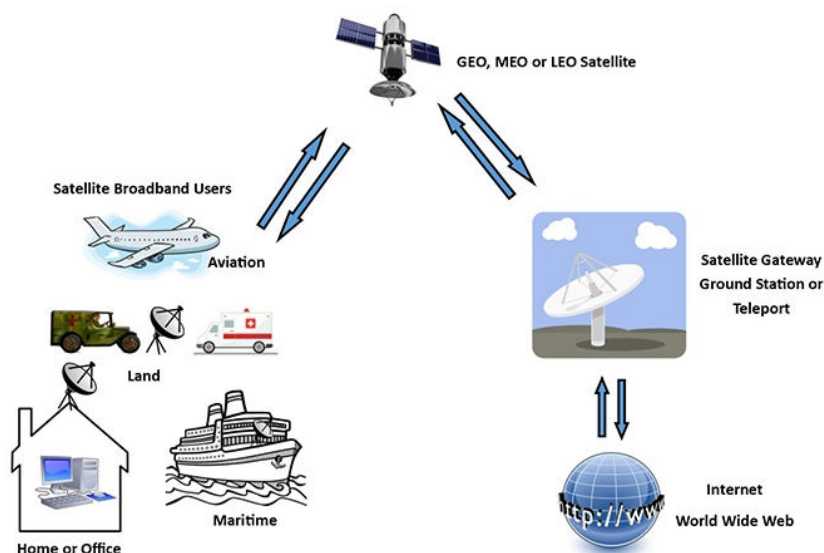
THE HINDU
BUSINESS LINE

India is 48% short in terms of broadband penetration today, even after 25 years of terrestrial mobile services. Satellite Internet offers an alternative to bridge the gap and provide internet access in remote and underdeveloped areas.

WHAT IS SATELLITE INTERNET?

- Satellite internet is **wireless internet** beamed down from satellites orbiting the Earth instead of optical fiber or mobile networks.

How Satellite Broadband Works Virtually Anywhere



S. No.		Terrestrial Broadband Internet	Satellite Internet
1.	Data Aggregation	Happens on the ground (in base stations)	Happens in the space (via satellites)
2.	Line of Sight Requirement	No direct line of sight needed	Requires a clear line of sight to the satellite (via an antenna)
3.	Latency	Minimal latency	Higher latency due to time taken by signals to travel from space to Earth
4.	Coverage	Most suitable for urban areas, or areas with supporting infrastructure. High cost of deployment in remote/inaccessible areas.	Can cover remote and underserved areas.

IS SATELLITE INTERNET AVAILABLE IN INDIA?

- Yes. Presently, the use of satellite internet is **restricted to minimal applications** — such as disaster management, defence, scientific locations, etc.
- Key hurdles are **high latency of these services**, which means that real-time transmission is hard. However, things are changing with the launch of ISRO's high throughput GEO (Geostationary Equatorial Orbit) satellites which can beam high-speed internet up to 14 gigabits per second.
- **Many global players** are providing satellite broadband services by deploying **low earth orbit (LEO) satellites**.
 - They are launching a **constellation of satellites** very close to the earth's surface in order to reduce the latency of satellite broadband.
 - **E.g.**, Elon Musk's Starlink, Airtel backed OneWeb, Amazon's Project Kuiper, Canadian satellite major Telesat, JioSpaceFiber etc.
- **India's Space Policy 2023** permits foreign entities to set-up infrastructure and offer satellite-based services, after obtaining permission from **INSpace**.

BENEFITS OF SATELLITE INTERNET:

- **Provide high-speed internet services in remote and underserved areas**, where terrestrial networks cannot be set up. (or the cost of putting fiber is too high) **E.g.**, unreachable terrains of Himalayas, middle of the ocean etc.

- **High Scalability:** Can be expanded quickly to cover large areas, as compared to the delays in laying optical fiber cable infrastructure.
- **Resilient to disasters:** Maintain connectivity during terrestrial disasters where broadband cables infrastructure may be disrupted.

CHALLENGES ASSOCIATED WITH SATELLITE INTERNET:

- **Limited coverage:** Satellite internet is most effective in areas with clear line-of-sight to the satellites, which would be challenging in densely populated urban areas or regions with obstructive terrain.
- **Latency:** Higher latency as signals must travel between Earth and satellites in orbit, may impact real-time applications. (especially GEO satellites)
- **Affordability:** Equipment-cost related to satellite dish passed on to end-users may present barriers in adoption, in comparison to cheaper broadband internet. The cost per bit is also very high currently to make it operationally viable.
- **Space debris:** Launch of thousands of satellites for internet constellations has raised concerns about space debris.
- **Cyber security:** Satellites are vulnerable to jamming, hacking and other cyber-attacks which can disrupt internet communication.

Satellite internet can complement the existing traditional fiber and mobile broadband services to bridge digital divide and scale-up quality internet access.

INDIA TESTS NUCLEAR-CAPABLE BALLISTIC MISSILE

#DEFENCE TECHNOLOGY

Primary Source: The Hindu

India has tested a **nuclear-capable ballistic missile** from a nuclear-powered submarine off the coast of Visakhapatnam in the **Bay of Bengal**.

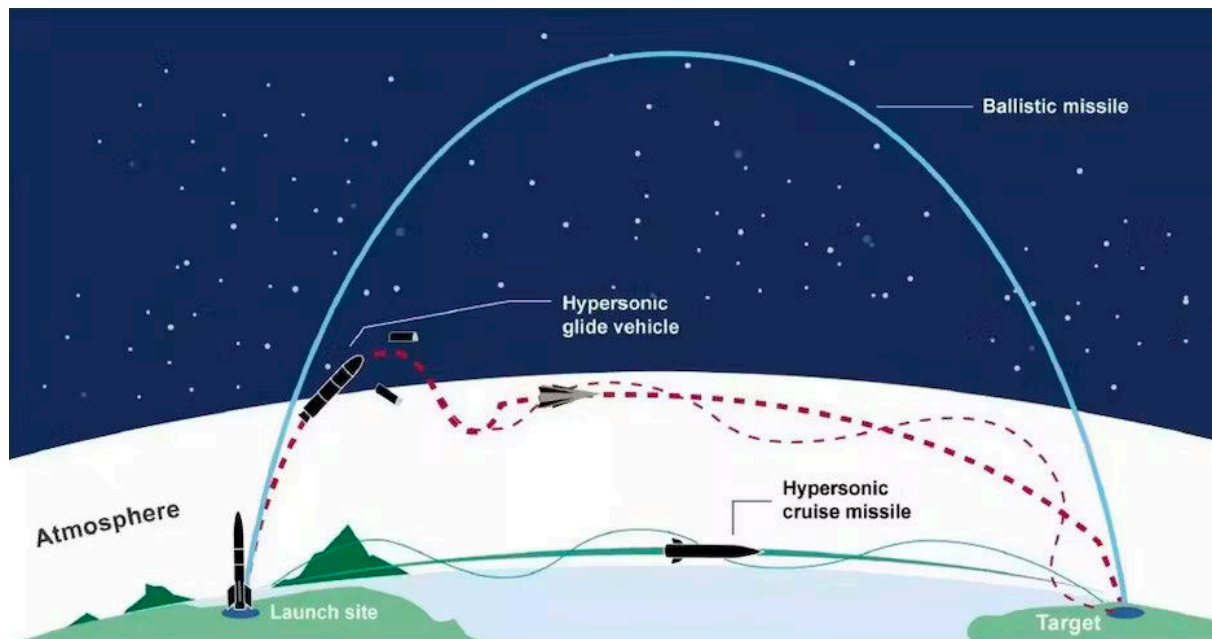
MAJOR HIGHLIGHTS:

- The **K4 missile** (range ~3,500 km) was tested from **INS Arighaat** submarine.
- It was the **first test of the submarine-launched ballistic missile** (SLBM) from a submarine.
- **Significance:**

- The test gives a major boost to **India's nuclear deterrence and strategic capabilities**.
- With it, India has become part of a small group of nations **having the capability to fire a nuclear missile** from **land, air and undersea**.

WHAT IS A BALLISTIC MISSILE?

- It is a type of missile that uses **projectile motion** to deliver warheads on a target. These weapons are **powered only during relatively brief periods** and most of the flight is unpowered.
- Short-range ballistic missiles (SRBM) typically stay within the Earth's atmosphere, while other types of larger range ballistic missiles **travel outside the atmosphere**, re-enter the atmosphere to strike the predetermined fixed target. They are **not actively guided** like cruise missiles throughout their entire flight.



- **Types of Ballistic Missiles:**
 - **Short-range ballistic missile** (SRBM): Range- 300 to 1,000 kilometres. **E.g.,** Prithvi-II (India)
 - **Medium-range ballistic missile** (MRBM): Range- 1,000 to 3,500 kms. **E.g.,** Agni-II (India)
 - **Intermediate-range ballistic missile:** Range- 3,500 to 5,500 kms. **E.g.,** Agni-III (India)
 - **Intercontinental ballistic missile** (ICBM): Range- over 5,500 kms. **E.g.,** Agni-V
- The missiles travel at **extremely high speeds** (up to 24 Mach) during their terminal phase, making it

challenging for defensive systems to track and **intercept them** in real-time.

- They can **carry conventional high explosives** as well as **chemical, biological, or nuclear munitions**.

What is the K4 missile?

- K4 missile is a **nuclear-capable ballistic missile** developed by DRDO.
- **Specifications:**
 - **Range:**
 - Full load: ~3,000 kilometres

- Reduced load: ~4,000 kilometres
- **Length:** 12 metres
- **Guidance system:** Inertial navigation system with GPS/NavIC satellite guidance
- **Circular error probable:** <10 metres.
- **Warhead capacity:** weighing up to 2 tonnes
- **Powered by:** Solid rocket propellant.

WHAT IS INS ARIGHAAT?

- **INS Arighaat** is India's **second nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarine**, commissioned into service in August 2024.
- It measures 111.6 metres in length and has a submerged displacement of **6000 tons**.
- It is powered by a 83-MW **pressurised light-water reactor with enriched uranium**.
- INS Arighat is equipped with ballistic missiles capable of carrying nuclear warheads. It is armed with a **750-km-range K-15 Submarine Launched Ballistic Missile (SLBM)** and **~3500-km-range SLBM K-4**.

Killer K-4

Strike range - **3,500 km**
Length - **12 mtr**
Width - **1.3 mtr**
Weight - **17 ton**
Warhead - **2 ton**
Engine - **Solid-fueled**
Difficult to be tracked and destroyed by any anti-ballistic weapon



- In October 2016, **India and Russia signed a deal for four stealth frigates**, two to be built in Russia and two to be constructed at Goa Shipyard Limited under technology transfer.
- **INS Tushil** is the **first of the two ships** to be constructed in Russia.
- The **second frigate Tamal** is expected to be delivered to the Indian Navy in Russia in the first quarter of 2025.

KEY FACTS ABOUT INS TUSHIL

- **INS Tushil** is an **upgraded Krivak III class frigate** (warship) under Project 1135.6.
- **Specification:** 125-metre-long, 3,900-tonne ship.
- **Operational capabilities:** Designed for **blue water operations** across the spectrum of naval warfare in **all four dimensions air, surface, underwater and electromagnetic**.
- **Armament and Technology:** It is armed with a range of advanced weapons, including:
 - **Brahmos supersonic cruise missiles** (jointly developed by India-Russia)
 - Vertically-launched **Shtil Surface-to-Air missiles** with enhanced ranges
 - **Medium-range anti-air and surface gun** with advanced stealth features
 - Optically-controlled close-range **rapid fire gun system**
 - **Anti-submarine torpedoes and rockets**
 - Advanced electronic warfare and communication suite.
- It is also capable of embarking upgraded anti-submarine and **airborne early warning helicopters**, the **Kamov 28** and **Kamov 31**.
- **Speed:** Powered by an **advanced gas turbine propulsion plant** with state-of-the-art controls, it is capable of achieving speeds in **exceeding 30 knots**.

Significance:

INS Tushil reinforces the Indian Navy's role as a net security provider in the Indian Ocean Region.

INS TUSHIL

#DEFENCE TECHNOLOGY

PRIMARY SOURCE THE HINDU

*Stealth guided missile frigate **INS Tushil** was commissioned into the Indian Navy at Kaliningrad, **Russia**.*



BACKGROUND

K-9 VAJRA ARTILLERY GUN

#DEFENCE TECHNOLOGY

PRIMARY
SOURCE THE HINDU

The Defence Ministry has signed a **₹7,629-crore contract** with Larsen & Toubro (L&T) for additional 100 units of **K9 Vajra-T artillery guns** for the Indian Army.



ABOUT K9 VAJRA-T ARTILLERY GUN

- K9-Vajra is a 155 mm, 52-calibre tracked **self-propelled howitzer** built in India.
- **Built by:**
 - L&T with technology transferred from a **South Korean defence firm** (Hanwha Defense) based on its K9 Thunder.

- They are being manufactured in Hazira, Gujarat.
- Each gun weighs **50 tonnes** and has a **firing range of 50 kilometres** with **high accuracy**.
- It is able to operate in **sub-zero temperatures** in **high-altitude areas** to its full potential.
 - K9 Vajra was mainly bought for use in deserts but can be deployed in mountains and plains as well.
- **Note:** Army has already inducted 100 units of 155mm/52 calibre K9 Vajra-T guns (the contract for which was signed between India & South Korea in 2017).

SIGNIFICANCE

- **Artillery modernisation** and augments India's **long-range fire power** in the Northern borders, enabling higher precision.
 - Induction of **Dhanush, K-9 Vajra** and **M777 Ultra Light Howitzers** has **enhanced artillery firepower** on Northern borders.

PRACTICE QUESTIONS

MCQS

Q1. What is the benefit of placing the Coronagraph and Occulter on separate satellites in the Proba-3 mission?

- To reduce the cost of the mission
- To allow larger instruments to be deployed and increases sensitivity to fainter signals
- To ensure the satellites can be easily launched from different locations
- To make the mission more environmentally-friendly.

Q2. With reference to Space Docking Experiment (SpaDeX); consider the following statements

- This is a collaborative space mission envisioned by NASA, ISRO and European space agency (ESA).
- Presently Russia is the only country in the world to have space docking technology.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

- 1 only
- 2 only
- Both 1 and 2
- Neither 1 nor 2

Q3. Consider the following statements with reference to Haemophilia:

- Haemophilia is a rare genetic disorder that alters the shape of the red blood cells.
- Haemophilia is more common in males than in females.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- 1 only
- 2 only
- Both 1 and 2
- Neither 1 nor 2

Q4. Consider the following statements with reference to Ballistic missiles:

1. Ballistic missiles are actively guided throughout the entire flight.
2. Ballistic missiles can carry conventional high explosives as well as chemical, biological and nuclear munitions.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- | | |
|------------------|---------------------|
| (a) 1 only | (b) 2 only |
| (c) Both 1 and 2 | (d) Neither 1 nor 2 |

Q5. With reference to the INS Tushil, consider the following statements:

1. It is a Russian-manufactured stealth guided missile frigate.
2. It is part of the upgraded Krivak III class of Project 1135.6 frigates.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- | | |
|------------------|---------------------|
| (a) 1 only | (b) 2 only |
| (c) Both 1 and 2 | (d) Neither 1 nor 2 |

DESCRIPTIVE QUESTIONS

- Q1.** The growing availability of satellite-based internet services create new prospects for digital connectivity, but there are significant challenges associated with this technology. Discuss.
- Q2.** What is gene therapy? Discuss the potential benefits, challenges, and ethical concerns in the context of recent advancements in gene therapy in India.

Answers: 1-b, 2-d, 3-b, 4-b, 5-c

HISTORY, HERITAGE & CULTURE

GS PAPER (PRELIMS) & GS PAPER I (MAIN)

MAHA KUMBHA MELA

#ARTANDCULTURE #FESTIVALS

PRIMARY
SOURCE THE HINDU

The **Maha Kumbh Mela 2025** is scheduled to be held between 13 January to 26 February, 2025 at Prayagraj, Uttar Pradesh. This Kumbha is likely to attract 400 million people from across the world.



ABOUT KUMBH, ARDHKUMBHA AND MAHAKUMBH

- **Kumbh Mela** is a major pilgrimage and festival in Hinduism or Sanatana tradition. It is a **religious pilgrimage** that is celebrated **four times**, over a **course of 12 years**, at **four river-bank pilgrimage sites**:
 - Prayagraj (Ganges-Yamuna-Sarasvati rivers confluence)
 - Haridwar (Ganges)
 - Nashik (Godavari)
 - Ujjain (Shipra). All the pilgrims take a holy dip in the river water.
- **Kumba** is held at Prayagraj, Haridwar, Ujjain and Nasik every three years.
- **Ardhkumbha** is held at Prayagraj and Haridwar every 6 years.
- **Mahakumbha** is the event that takes place **after every 144 years**, following 12 Purna Kumbh Melas.

KEY FACTS ABOUT KUMBHA MELA

- Kumbh Mela has been included in the **UNESCO's Representative list of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity (2017)**. The event intrinsically encapsulates the **science of astronomy, astrology, spirituality, ritualistic traditions, and socio-cultural customs and practices**, making it extremely rich in knowledge.
- Each site's celebration is based on a **distinct set of astrological positions of the Sun, the Moon, and Jupiter**. The celebrations occur at the exact moment when these positions are fully occupied, as it is considered to be the holiest time in Hinduism.
- This congregation, primarily, includes Ascetics, Saints, Sadhus, Sadhvis, Kalpvasis and Pilgrims from all walks of life. The seekers believe that bathing in these rivers is a means to **prāyaścitta** (atonement, penance, restorative action) for past mistakes, and that it cleanses them of their sins.

ORIGIN OF CONCEPT

1. Ancient India:

- **Puranas** are the oldest source of *Magha mela* (probably the older name of Kumbh mela). According to these texts, the gods and demons once engaged in a cosmic battle over a **kumbha (pot)** containing Amrita, the elixir of immortality. This struggle was part of their joint endeavour to churn the milky ocean. During this celestial tug-of-war, drops of amrita fell on **four earthly locations: Haridwar, Ujjain, Nashik, and Prayag** (now Prayagraj). These sites, sanctified by the divine nectar, later became the venues for the Kumbh Mela.
- **Other references:** However, the earliest mention of holy bath at Prayag is mentioned in Sanskrit text **Rigveda** and Pali text **Majjhima Nikaya**.
- **7th century Buddhist monk Hiuen Tsang**, who travelled during the period of King Harsha, mentioned about people gathering to take dip in hold rivers.

2. Medieval India:

- It was **Adi Shankara** in the 8th century who formalised the Kumbha Mela. He intended to establish major gatherings for philosophical discourse and debates among the Hindu monastic community. These gatherings were aimed at consolidating and strengthening the philosophical foundations of Hinduism, fostering a sense of unity and shared purpose among its practitioners.

NATIONAL MARITIME HERITAGE COMPLEX

#ARTANDCULTURE

PRIMARY SOURCE THE HINDU

The **National Maritime Heritage Complex (NMHC)**, envisaged to be one of the largest maritime complexes in the world, is under construction near **Lothal** in Gujarat.

ABOUT NATIONAL MARITIME HERITAGE COMPLEX

- National Maritime Heritage Complex (NMHC) is an under construction **tourism complex** near **Lothal, Gujarat**.
- Spread over 400 acres, the complex will present the **maritime history & heritage** of India covering 4500 years.
- Developed by:** Ministry of Ports, Shipping & Waterway.
- Project components of NMHC** include **NMHC museum**; Open Aquatic Gallery, Lighthouse Museum, Bagicha Complex, Coastal State Pavilions and Recreation of Lothal city, Eco resorts and Museotel, Theme based parks, Maritime research institute etc.
- The Directorate General of Lighthouses and Lightships (DGLL) will construct the **World's tallest light house** in the complex.

VISION OF THIS COMPLEX

- Become a leading Global Tourist Destination.
- Preserve and showcase India's Maritime heritage.
- Become a centre for International Maritime Fairs and exhibition.
- Establish International Collaboration and exchange programs.
- Collaboration with Coastal states and UTs.
- To be established as a Maritime training and research centre.

ABOUT LOTHAL IVC SITE

Historical Significance:

- Lothal was an **ancient maritime port city** of the Indus Valley Civilisation, dating back 4500 years.
- Location:** Ahmedabad district, Gujarat (80 km southwest of Ahmedabad).
- The name "Lothal" combines two Gujarati words, *Loth* and *Thal*, meaning "the mound of the dead."
- It flourished as a **thriving trading port** during 3700 BCE, linked to ancient trade routes from Sindh to Saurashtra.



ARCHAEOLOGICAL DISCOVERIES

- Excavations (1955–1960) by the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) uncovered the world's **oldest known artificial dock**, connected to an ancient course of the Sabarmati River.
- Key features include:
 - Acropolis** and **Lower Town**
 - Bead Factory** and **Warehouses**
 - Advanced **Drainage System**
 - Unearthed **canals** and **dockyards** highlight its significance as a trading hub.

GLOBAL CONNECTIONS

- Artefacts suggest trade links with **Mesopotamia**, **Egypt**, and **Persia**.
- An entire township with markets and docks showcases the city's advanced urban planning.

HISTORY, HERITAGE & CULTURE

ARTEFACTS AND MUSEUM

- The **Archaeological Museum** near the site displays:
 - Jewellery, pottery, seals, religious symbols.
 - Everyday objects that reflect the daily life and craftsmanship of the time.



findings at Lothal

UNESCO NOMINATION

The site has been proposed for inclusion as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, underlining its cultural and historical importance.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL LEGACY

- Lothal's excavation has contributed the **largest number of antiquities** in modern Indian archaeology.
- It is believed to have been part of a major river system, making it a key node in ancient trade and commerce.

USTAD ZAKIR HUSSAIN

#ARTANDCULTURE #PERSONALITIES IN NEWS



*Tabla maestro and one of the greatest Cultural ambassadors of India, **Ustad Zakir Hussain**, passed away at the age of 73 in the US. He is known to take Indian classical music to the global stage.*

ABOUT ZAKIR HUSSAIN

- He was the son of table maestro **Ustad Alla Rakha**.
- He was known for incredible speed, dexterity, and creativity, mesmerising audiences across cultures and making him one of the greatest musicians of all time.



- **Specialisation:** Hindustani Classical Music, Jazz and fusion.
- He lent his musical genius to many Bollywood movies such as *Parasmani*, *Muhafiz*, *Mr and Mrs Iyer*, *Parzania* and *Manto*.
- **Awards:**
 - Government of India's *Sangeet Natak Akademi Award* in 1990, *Sangeet Natak Akademi Fellowship (Ratna Sadsyata)* in 2018.
 - United States's *National Heritage Fellowship*, the highest award given to traditional artists and musicians.
 - He has won four *Grammy awards*.
- **Biography:** *Zakir Hussain: A Life in Music* written by Nasreen Munni Kabir.

ABOUT HINDUSTANI CLASSICAL MUSIC

- Hindustani Classical Music draws inspiration from **Rigveda, Yajurvedic chants and Natya Shastra** (gives information on scales, melodic forms, tala and musical instruments).
- **Key texts in Hindustani Music:**
 - **Brihaddesi** by **Matanga** compiled between 8th-9th century AD.
 - **Sangeeta Ratankara** written by **Sarangadeva** (13th century AD)
- **Tala System:** Tala is the cyclic arrangement of time units which is central to Hindustani Classical Music.
- **Two broad categories of Musical forms:**
 - **Anibaddha Sangeet:** Free-flowing music, not restricted by meaningful words and tala. Its finest form is the **alap**.
 - **Nibaddha Sangeet:** Structured compositions with tala and lyrics, such as Dhrupad and Khayal. Prabandha is a specific type of Nibaddha.
 - Of all known prabandhas, Jayadeva's (12th century) compositions are best known. His significant work was Gita Govinda, and his songs are ashtapadis (each song has eight couplets).

MAIN STYLES OF SINGING IN HINDUSTANI MUSIC

There are 10 main styles of singing in Hindustani music like the **Dhrupad, Dhamar, Hori, Khayal, Tappa, Chaturang, Ragasagar, Tarana, Sargam and Thumri**.

- **Dhrupad:** Oldest surviving classical style of Hindustani vocal music. It refers to both the poetry's verse

structure and the manner in which it is sung. In the mediaeval era, dhrupad rose to prominence as the primary singing style.

- Baba Gopal Das, Swami Haridas, and Tansen (who was regarded as one of the Navaratna or nine gems of the Mughal court) were supported by Akbar.
- **Man Singh Tomar**, the Maharaja of Gwalior was responsible for the enormous vogue of Dhrupad. Bean and Pakhwaj were associated with Dhrupad.
- **Khyal**: It means the idea or imagination is a Persian term. As it allows for more improvisation, this style is well-liked by artists. It is built on a collection of brief songs with two to eight lines. Khyal composition is typically also referred to as a **Bandish**.
 - The origin of this style was accredited to **Amir Khusaru** (13th century). It attained its maturity at the hands of Niyamat Khan Sadarang and Adarang of the 18th century.
 - Amir Khusrau is believed to have invented **the sitar and the tabla and is said to have introduced new ragas**.
 - There are **Gharanas in Khayal** which are schools of singing founded or developed by various individuals or patrons such as king or nobility. Important gharanas are **Gwalior gharana** (oldest), **Agra gharana** (founded by Khuda Baksh) and **Jaipur gharana** (directly took off from Dhrupad), **Rampur Saheswan gharana** (Uttar Pradesh).
- **Thumri and Tappa**: Thumri is a love song whereas Tappa consists of the song uttered in a fast note pattern.
- **Tarana Style**: In this style, the rhythm plays a very crucial role and uses many words that are sung at a fast tempo. The origin of this style was also accredited to **Amir Khusaru**.

DALAI LAMA

#PERSONALITIES IN NEWS

PRIMARY SOURCE THE HINDU

*Tibetans-in-exile in Dharamshala celebrated the 35th anniversary of conferment of the **Noble Peace Prize** to Dalai Lama.*



WHO IS DALAI LAMA?

- "Dalai Lama" is a title which is a combination of the Mongolic word *dalai* ('ocean') and the Tibetan word *lama* ('master, guru').
- This title was **first conferred in 1578** upon Sonam Gyatso, the leader of the Gelug school of Tibetan Buddhism, by **Altan Khan**, the first Shunyi King of Ming China.
- The first two Dalai Lamas were offered this title posthumously. The Third Dalai Lama was a living leader to receive this title (Sonam Gyatso).

THE DALAI LAMA LINEAGE

- All *tulkus* in the lineage of the Dalai Lamas are considered manifestations of the **Buddha Avalokiteshvara**, the bodhisattva of compassion.
- The **14th Dalai Lama** (Tenzin Gyatso) escaped from Lhasa in 1959 during the Tibetan diaspora and lives in exile in Dharamshala, India. He was recognised as the reincarnation of the previous 13th Dalai Lama, Thubten Gyatso at the age of two.

SIGNIFICANCE

- The Dalai Lama is the symbol of unification of Tibet.
- He represents Buddhist values and traditions not tied to a specific school.
- From the 5th Dalai Lama onwards, the lineage was enjoined with the secular role of governing Tibet.

PM TO RELEASE COLLECTED WORKS OF SUBRAMANIA BHARTI

#MODERNHISTORY #PERSONALITIES IN NEWS

PRIMARY SOURCE THE HINDU

The Prime Minister of India will release the compendium of complete works of great Tamil poet and freedom fighter C.

Subramania Bharati (a prominent leader of the independent movement and a prolific writer and poet).

WHO IS SUBRAMANIA BHARTI?

- Born on the 11th of December 1882, S. Bharti was a Tamil author, poet, journalist, Indian independence activist, social reformer and polyglot. Subramania Bharati was given the title of “**Mahakavi Bharati**”.
- **Early Career:**
 - He worked as a **journalist in Swadesamitran** (a Tamil daily) in 1904.
 - In 1906, he also started working for Tamil weekly **India** and the English newspaper **Bala Bharatham**.
- **Themes in his writing:**
 - Emancipation of women, standing against child marriage, reforming Brahminism and religion.
 - Idea of patriotism for India and the independence movement against the British Empire.
- He participated in the **Indian Independence Movement**. On account of his arrest orders, he escaped to the French ruled Pondicherry. While there, Bharati edited and published the weekly Journal **India** and **Vijaya**, which the British banned to suppress his nationalist outputs.



LITERARY WORKS OF BHARTI

- Bharathi used **simple words and rhythms**, unlike the previous century works in Tamil, which had complex vocabulary. He also proposed novel ideas and techniques in his poems.
- His **noted works include** *Panjali Sabatham*, *Kannan Paatu*, *Kuyil Paatu*, *Paapa Paatu*, *Chinnanchriu Kiliye* and *Vinayagar Nanmanimalai*.
- He also translated **Patanjali's Yoga Sutra** and **Bhagavad Gita** to Tamil.

NAGALAND'S HORNBILL FESTIVAL

#FESTIVALS

PRIMARY SOURCE The Indian EXPRESS

*The 25th edition of Nagaland's famed Hornbill Festival **began on December 1, 2024** at the scenic Kisama Heritage Village in Kohima, Nagaland.*

ABOUT NAGALAND'S HORNBILL FESTIVAL

- The Hornbill Festival is **Nagaland's largest public event**.
- **Organised by:** Nagaland government since 2000.
- **Aim:** To **boost tourism** by showcasing Naga heritage and culture, and act as a unifying force within the state.
- The festival acts as an **umbrella of the major festivals** celebrated by the **14 recognised Naga tribes** in the state, each replete with its own traditions and practices.
- It is the only time when '**Thutse or local rice beer**' is openly sold (within the festival venue) with the consent of the state government, in the otherwise dry state.

THANKA ANKI PROCESSION

#ARTANDCULTURE

PRIMARY SOURCE THE HINDU

*As preparations for the **Mandala Puja** gather momentum at Sabarimala, the ceremonial procession carrying the sacred golden attire, **Thanka Anki**, began its journey from the **Sree Parthasarathy Temple** in Aranmula.*

RELEVANCE OF THE TOPIC

- **Prelims:** Key facts about Thanka Anki Procession; Sabarimala Temple

ABOUT THE PROCESSION

- This is a religious procession where **Thanka Anki** (royal ornament / Golden Attire) is carried to **Sabarimala temple** from Parthasarathy Temple in Aranmula, Pathanamthitta district, Kerala.
- The procession will conclude at Sabarimala on December 25, with the Deeparadhana being performed after adorning **Lord Ayyappa's idol** with these sacred ornaments.
- The golden attire is transported in a specially designed chariot modelled on the Sabarimala temple. The procession halts at **three temples** along its journey.

HISTORY, HERITAGE & CULTURE

- Weighing 420 sovereigns, the *Thanka Anki* was offered to the Sabarimala temple by the late **Chithira Thirunal Balarama Varma** of the **erstwhile Travancore royal family** in 1973.



SABARIMALA TEMPLE

- The Sabarimala is a Hindu temple dedicated to the **god Ayyappan** (also known as Dharma Shasta) who is the **son** of the deities Shiva and Mohini (female avatar of the lord Vishnu).
- **Location:** Sabarimala hill, Pathanamthitta district, Kerala, India.
- The temple is surrounded by 18 hills in the **Periyar Tiger Reserve**.
- It is one of the largest annual pilgrimage sites in the world, with an estimate of over 10 to 15 million devotees visiting every year.
- The temple practices prohibit the women between the **ages of 10 and 50 years** from accessing the temple premises.

THRISSUR POORAM

#ARTANDCULTURE #FESTIVALS

PRIMARY
SOURCE

THE HINDU

The Supreme Court has temporarily stayed Kerala High Court's restrictions on using elephants in temple festivals (like Thrissur Pooram).

RELEVANCE OF THE TOPIC

- **Prelims:** Key facts about Thrissur Pooram.

MAJOR HIGHLIGHTS

- It is a centuries-old tradition that a **large number of decorated elephants** are paraded at the famous **Thrissur Pooram festival**.
- In November 2024, the Kerala High Court had imposed strict guidelines that included a **maximum of ten elephants** and **maintaining a minimum distance of three metres** between them in the pooram (festival) procession.
- The Supreme Court has kept the tradition in mind to temporarily **halt the restrictions** imposed by the Kerala High Court and allowed the use of elephants in temple festivals.



ABOUT THRISSUR POORAM

- Thrissur Pooram is an **annual Hindu temple festival** held in **Thrissur, Kerala**.
- It is held at the **Vadakkunnathan Temple** dedicated to **Lord Vadakkunnatha** (Shiva) in the Malayalam month of Medam (April-May).
- The festival was the brain child of **Shakthan Thampuran (ruler of Cochin from 1790 to 1805)**, who organised the festival with the participation of 10 temples.
- **Unique Features:**
 - Grand display of caparisoned elephants, dazzling parasols, and percussion music.
 - An elaborate procession of **50 decorated elephants** with the **traditional music** of Chenda Melam and Pancha Vadyam marks the main attraction of the festival.
 - The finale is marked by a **grand fireworks** show.

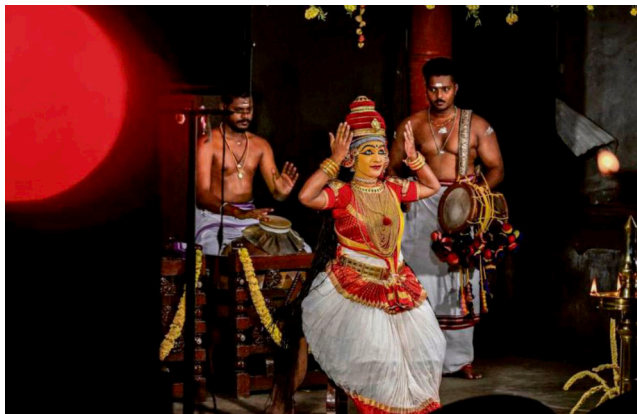
NAANGIARKOOTHU

#THEATRE #ARTANDCULTURE

PRIMARY
SOURCE THE HINDU

ABOUT NAANGIARKOOTHU

- Naangiarkoothu (or Nangiaramma Koothu) is a distinguished **Sanskrit dance-theatre form from Kerala**, with a rich heritage spanning at least 1500 years.
- This is a **solo dance drama** performed by female members (Nangiar) of the **Chakkia community** (known for their mastery of *Koothu*)
- It is traditionally presented in the **temple theatre**, the **Koothambalam or Koothupura**.
- It is mainly centered on the **legends of Lord Krishna**. Verses are sung and interpreted through mime and dance.



- It is predominantly characterised by **Abhinaya**, the expressive aspect of dance, with minimal emphasis on *nritta*, or pure dance elements. It comprises two significant segments:
 - **Nirvahanam**, a retrospective solo act recounting past events.
 - **The play itself**, featuring dialogues and multiple characters.
- The mudras are even more elaborate. Movements, gestures and facial expressions have their origin in **Natyasastra** (the treatise on theatre, written by Sage Bharatha in the 2nd century BC).
- The performance is accompanied with **Mizhavu** (a percussion instrument) and **Ilathalam** (cymbals).
- It is still **performed in temples** like Vadakkunnatha temple at Thrissur, Sri Krishna temple at

Amabalappuzha, Koodal Manickyam temple at Irinjalakkuda and Kumaranalloor temple at Kottayam.

STORY OF EVOLUTION

The inception of **Nangiarkoothu** holds a fascinating history.

"It is said that King **Kulashekara Varman**, impressed by the talents of a Nangiar actress, married her. However, some segments of society viewed her children as outcasts. Upon learning of this injustice, the king granted them special rights to perform Koothu, a traditional art form, in temples across his kingdom. He even commissioned the writing of the text "**Sri Krishnacharitam**" for the Nangiaris to perform. To support these performances, tax-free properties were allocated. Over time, the community gained recognition, and efforts were made to grant equal status to Nangiaris. The performance typically spans two parts, each lasting around one and a half hours."

PAPIER MACHE ART OF KASHMIR

#ARTANDCULTURE

PRIMARY
SOURCE THE HINDU

*This Christmas, the papier mache artisans in Srinagar, Jammu & Kashmir have made thousands of **papier mache dodos**, which are being exported to the markets of Europe.*

WHAT IS PAPIER MACHE ART?

- **Papier** means paper and **Mache** means crushed and ground.
- **Origin** in Ancient China.
- It is a versatile craft technique in which **waste paper is shredded** and mixed with water and a binder to produce a pulp ideal for modelling or moulding.
 - The pulp dries to a hard surface and allows the creation of light, strong and inexpensive objects of any shape, even very complicated ones.



- Paper-mâché reinforced with textiles or boiled cardboard (carton bouilli) can be used for durable, sturdy objects.
- There is also a "laminating process", a method in which strips of paper are glued together in layers.
- The art has been used to manufacture boxes (small and big), bowls, trays, étagères, useful and decorative items, models, birds and animals, vases, lights, corporate gifts etc.

In KASHMIRI CULTURE

- In the **14th century**, this art was introduced by **Mir Sayyid Ali Hamadani** who was a sufi saint and settled in Kashmir with his craftsmen followers.
- Originated in the 15th century when King Zain-ul-Abidin invited papier-mâché artists from Central Asia.
- **Notable example:** Shah Hamdan Mosque in Srinagar has papier mache art on its walls.
- Kashmir Paper Machie has a Geographical **Indication Tag**.

MEHRAULI ARCHAEOLOGICAL PARK

#ARTANDCULTURE #MONUMENTS

PRIMARY
SOURCE THE HINDU

The Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) has told the Supreme Court that two structures inside the Mehrauli Archaeological Park in Delhi bear religious significance as devotees visit daily to the 13th century **Ashiq Allah Dargah** and **Chillagah of Baba Farid**, the revered 13th century Sufi saint.

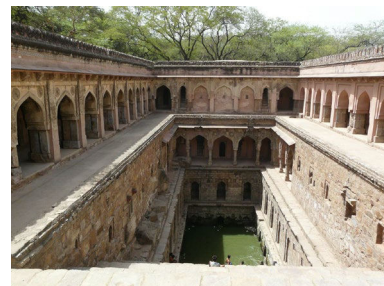
ABOUT MEHRAULI ARCHAEOLOGICAL PARK

- It is a large area spanning over 200 acres in South Delhi and belongs to pre-Sultanate to Colonial period architecture.
- It covers over **400 monuments** including destroyed temples (Jain and Hindu), masjid, Dargahs, Qutub Complex, forts and tombs of many rulers including Balban.
- Archaeological structures in this park showcase **Indo-Islamic architecture** mostly belonging to the Delhi Sultanate era.

IMPORTANT STRUCTURES

1. Rajon ki Baoli:

- It is a stepwell and also includes a mosque and tomb. It was built during the period of **Daulat Khan Lodhi** (1506 CE).



- The name Rajon Ki Baoli is derived from the 'Rajbirs' or 'Mistris' - the term used for masons. It got its name in the early 20th century because of the masons that moved in permanently into the area.

2. Jamali Kamali Mosque and Tomb:

- It is the tomb of a Sufi saint **Shaikh Jamali Kamboh** and possibly his disciple **Kamali**. They belonged to the period of transition between Lodhis and Mughals.



3. Tomb of Ghiyas ud din Balban:

- It was built in 1287 in rubble masonry style. According to many historians it had India's first true **Islamic Dome** (Alai Darwaza of 1311 being the earliest surviving dome).

4. Jahaz Mahal:

- It was so named, since its reflection (illusion) in the surrounding reservoir looked like a **ship floating on a lake**.
- It is inferred to have been built during the **Lodi dynasty period** (1452–1526) as a pleasure resort, Sarai or an inn.





5. Zafar Mahal:

- It is considered as the last monumental structure built as a summer palace during the fading years of the Mughal era. It was built near the Dargah of sufi saint **Hazrat Khwaja Qutubuddin Bakhtiyar Kaki**.



- Nomenclature: Named after the last Mughal ruler **Bahadur Shah Zafar** (who built the doorway or Hathi Gate in the palace and completed the structure in 1847).
- **Patronage:** began during Mughal ruler Akbar Shah II (18th century).

6. Moti Masjid:

- The royal mosque is situated adjacent to the wall of **Dargah of Hazarat Qutubuddin Bakhtiyar Kaki**.
- This is a very small mosque with a double entrance. One door opens inside the premises of Dargah, and another opens in the Zafar Mahal. This was built by **Bahadur Shah I**.



PRACTICE QUESTIONS

MCQS

Q1. Which of the following is a key feature of the Nangyarkoothu dance drama?

- Predominantly focused on nritya (pure dance elements)
- Accompanied by the percussion instrument Mizhavu and cymbals Ilathalam
- Based on the legends of Lord Shiva
- Performed exclusively in secular theaters.

Q2. Consider the following statements with reference to Subramania Bharti:

- He translated Patanjali's Yoga Sutra and Bhagavad Gita to Tamil.
- He was the President of the Lucknow Session of Indian National Congress in 1916.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- 1 only
- 2 only
- Both 1 and 2
- Neither 1 nor 2

Q3. Who is credited with introducing papier-mâché art to Kashmir in the 14th century?

- (a) King Zain-ul-Abidin
- (b) Mir Sayyid Ali Hamadani
- (c) Shah Hamdan
- (d) Central Asian craftsmen

Q4. What is the significance of the Thanka Anki procession in Sabarimala?

- (a) It marks the beginning of the Mandala Puja festival.
- (b) It involves the transportation of sacred ornaments to Sabarimala.
- (c) It is conducted to celebrate the birth anniversary of Lord Ayyappa.
- (d) It is a cultural festival celebrated in Aranmula.

Q5. With reference to Thrissur Pooram, consider the following statements:

- 1. It is an annual event to celebrate the birth anniversary of Lord Ganesha in Kerala.
 - 2. Elephants are an important part of public display.
 - 3. This festival does not use any musical instrument.
- Which of the statements given above is/are incorrect?

- (a) 1 and 2 only
- (b) 2 and 3 only
- (c) 1 and 3 only
- (d) 1, 2 and 3

Q6. Which of the following texts provides detailed information on scales, melodic forms, tala, and musical instruments?

- (a) Sangeeta Ratnakara
- (b) Matanga's Brihaddesi
- (c) Natya Shastra
- (d) Gita Govinda

Answers: 1-b, 2-a, 3-b, 4-b, 5-c, 6-c

PART TWO

ETHICS, INTEGRITY & APTITUDE

Coverage from varied sources

CHINA IS WORLD'S LARGEST DEBT COLLECTOR

#ETHICS IN CONTEMPORARY INTERNATIONAL AID

Recently, the **International Debt Report 2024** was released by the **World Bank**. Among other trends, the report shows that **over 25% of the world's bilateral external debt** was owed to China in 2023, making the country the leading debt collector in the world. This has raised **ethical concerns** over the debt trap diplomacy used by China.

DISCUSSION OF ETHICAL ISSUES

1. **Deontological Duty** – Kantian deontology focuses on respecting sovereignty and autonomy. **Example:** China's \$8 billion loan to Sri Lanka maximised infrastructure development (utilitarian good) but violated the country's right to self-determination when it had to surrender Hambantota port (deontological violation).
2. **Virtue Ethics in International Relations** – Focuses on character traits like benevolence, justice, and integrity in lending practices. **Example:** China's lending to 16 cobalt mines in Democratic Republic of Congo demonstrates lack of virtuous lending - prioritising resource acquisition over genuine development assistance.
3. **Care Ethics and Relational Responsibilities** – Emphasises contextual relationships and responsibilities toward vulnerable parties. **Example:** China's 75% debt hold over Laos shows failure of care ethics - exploiting rather than nurturing development relationships despite obvious vulnerability.
4. **Social Contract Theory** – International aid should reflect mutually beneficial agreements between equal parties. **Example:** Pakistan owing 60% bilateral debt to China violates social contract principles - creates coercive rather than cooperative relationships.
5. **Rawlsian Justice Theory** - Aid should benefit least advantaged and ensure fair equality of opportunity. **Example:** China's Belt and Road Initiative violates *difference principle* - targets strategic advantages

rather than helping neediest nations improve their position. Concentration of debt ownership (25% of world's bilateral external debt held by China). Disproportionate burden on lower-income countries.

ETHICAL FRAMEWORK FOR INTERNATIONAL AID

1. Foundational Justice (John Rawls)

- The '*veil of ignorance*' test: Aid policies should be designed as if we don't know which country we'll be born in
- *Difference Principle*: Aid should prioritize improving conditions for the worst-off nations
- *Fair Equality of Opportunity*: Aid should create genuine development opportunities, not dependence

2. Capability Development (Amartya Sen & Martha Nussbaum)

- Aid should enhance recipients' fundamental *capabilities and freedoms*.
- Focus on developing *human capital* and *institutional capacity*.
- Respect for local agencies in determining development priorities.

3. Relational Ethics (Nel Noddings & Virginia Held)

- Aid relationships should be based on care and mutual respect.
- Emphasis on long-term relationships over transactional assistance.
- Recognition of contextual needs and cultural sensitivities.

4. Cosmopolitan Responsibility (Peter Singer & Thomas Pogge)

- Global moral obligations transcend national boundaries

- Wealthy nations have positive duties to assist poorer ones
- Addressing structural inequalities in global economic system

5. Sustainable Development (Hans Jonas)

- Imperative of responsibility toward future generations
- Environmental and social sustainability in aid programs
- Long-term viability over short-term gains

6. Practical Implementation:

1. Trust & Accountability (Onora O'Neill)
2. Democratic Participation (Jürgen Habermas)
3. Local Empowerment (Paulo Freire)
4. Cultural Respect (Charles Taylor)
5. Strategic Effectiveness (Peter Drucker)

Conclusion: International aid must balance moral imperatives with practical effectiveness while respecting recipient autonomy and dignity.

CASE STUDIES FOR PRACTICE

MAINS GS PAPER IV

Case Study 1: There is a general notion among students that cheating in exams and using unfair means can help achieve higher grades and secure better jobs in the future. A large number of students adopt such unethical practices, making it unfair for the small minority who prefer to stick to ethical means. Moreover, many argue that following ethical means may hinder the larger developmental goals of the country as it requires a lot of time and effort to achieve success through honest means. Additionally, some people believe that accepting small gifts in exchange for favors is harmless and can make the system more efficient. (250 words)

What is your evaluative judgement on such issues?

SOLUTION

Deontological Ethics: Cheating violates fundamental moral duties of honesty and fairness. Kant's Categorical Imperative suggests if everyone cheated, the entire educational system would collapse, making it an unsustainable maxim.

Utilitarian Analysis: While cheating may benefit individuals short-term, it creates negative consequences:

- Devalues genuine merit and competence
- Erodes institutional trust
- Produces incompetent professionals
- Damages societal fabric through normalized corruption

Virtue Ethics: Cheating corrupts character by:

- Weakening moral courage
- Diminishing intellectual honesty
- Eroding self-discipline
- Compromising integrity

Social Impact:

- Creates adverse selection where unethical practices become normalized
- Disadvantages honest individuals
- Weakens meritocracy
- Reduces overall human capital development

Administrative Ethics: The "small gifts" argument fails because:

- Creates slippery slope to larger corruption
- Undermines institutional fairness
- Reduces system efficiency long-term
- Violates public service principles
- Erodes trustworthiness and moral authority.

Moral Aptitude Perspective:

- Short-term thinking ignores long-term psychological costs
- Fails to consider impact on self-esteem and authentic achievement
- Demonstrates poor impulse control and ethical reasoning

Development Goals: Honest achievement better serves development by:

- Building genuine capabilities
- Fostering innovation culture
- Creating sustainable institutions
- Developing human capital properly

The argument that ethical means hinder development is flawed - sustainable development requires strong institutions and social trust, which unethical practices ultimately undermine.

Case Study 2: A company with significant women employees in the workforce was experiencing consistent decline in profit due to various factors. In an effort to turnaround the company's financial distress, the management hired a renowned marketing executive.

Within a short period of time, the marketing executive was successful in boosting sales. Employee incentives were restored and much of the debt was cleared in 6 months. However, rumors began to float that the new executive was indulging in sexual harassment of female employees at the workplace. The rumors, although not substantiated, created an atmosphere of fear and mistrust among the female employees.

One day, a female employee mustered courage to lodge a formal complaint of sexual harassment with the management, against the marketing executive. The management dismissed her complaint and did not take any action. The woman employee was left feeling helpless and abandoned.

Aggrieved with the company's indifference, she decided to file a FIR with the police, seeking justice. Sensing trouble and sensitivity of the situation, the company reached out to the woman employee to negotiate a settlement.

In the negotiation, she was offered a substantial sum of money and a promotion to withdraw the complaint and the FIR, and also to give a written statement exonerating the marketing executive. (250 words)

(a) Identify the ethical issues involved in this case.

(b) What options are available to the woman employee?

SOLUTION

Ethical Issues:

1. Sexual harassment violating human dignity, workplace safety, and gender equality
2. Management prioritizing financial performance over employee wellbeing
3. Corporate complicity in covering up criminal behavior. Violation of corporate governance principles.
4. Attempt to silence victims through monetary compensation
5. Abuse of power dynamics and organizational hierarchy. Impact on workplace culture and employee morale.

Options Available:

Legal measures:

- Pursue criminal case through FIR
- File civil lawsuit for damages
- Approach women's commission/labor court
- Document all evidence and witness statements

Institutional measures:

- Reject settlement offer
- Seek support from women's organizations
- Build coalition with other affected employees
- Consider whistleblower options

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR DECISION:

1. Personal Safety and Wellbeing:

- Risk of career implications
- Psychological impact of prolonged legal battle
- Financial security concerns

2. Societal Impact:

- Setting precedent for future cases
- Contributing to workplace safety
- Challenging systemic gender discrimination

3. Long-term Implications:

- Impact on organizational culture
- Deterrence effect on future misconduct
- Institutional accountability

The settlement offer represents an ethical compromise attempting to monetize justice. Financial imperatives must not overshadow ethical obligations, particularly affecting vulnerable employees.

PART THREE

ESSAYS OF THE MONTH

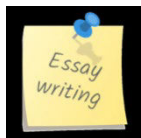
Selected essays from Rau's GSI students

EDUCATING THE MIND WITHOUT EDUCATING OUR HEART IS NO EDUCATION AT ALL"

#EDUCATION

SUBMITTED BY: ARZOO GUPTA

Disclaimer: The viewpoints in the topic are strictly personal of the writer above. The role of Rau's IAS Study Circle is to present the write-up in its original form, hence the study circle neither endorses nor rejects any viewpoint in the submission. The purpose is only to showcase the manner of writing.



Therefore, it is the sole responsibility of the reader to use his/her intellect to check the veracity of viewpoints.

Sam, a high school student excels academically and can recite complex theories & date with ease. However, despite his intellectual achievements, he often disregards the feelings & perspectives of others. For instance, he is quick to dismiss his classmates' contribution & struggle as irrelevant to his academic goals.

One day, the school organized a community service project. Sam viewed it merely as a requirement for his resume & participates with little enthusiasm.

In contrast, his classmate Maya, who also performs academically well, approached the project with genuine empathy & commitment. She listened to the Community's needs, understood their challenges & worked diligently to address them.

When the project concluded, the impact of Maya's effort is profound – She not only improved the Community but also built meaningful relations with its members. Sam's involvement though competent failed to make such a difference.

This highlights that true education involves more than just intellectual knowledge. It requires developing Emotional intelligence & compassion.

This essay will explore what does it mean to "educate the mind" versus "educate the heart"? What will be the result of solely focussing on educating the mind? Importance of educating the heart of other dimensions.

Educating the mind focuses on acquiring knowledge, critical thinking and intellectual skills. It involves cognitive development of Mastering the facts. On the other hand, Educating the heart emphasizes on nurturing qualities like compassion, integrity and the ability to connect with & understand other's feelings and perspectives.

Let's begin with why educating the mind alone is not sufficient? And how educating the heart balances it?

Intellectual knowledge can lead to professional success and personal pride, but they may not necessarily fulfil deeper emotional or existential needs. The pursuit of intellectual goals alone right not address the questions about the **meaning of one's actions or their impacts, having individuals feel restless or unsatisfied.**

Although when individuals develop emotional awareness and cultivate virtues like compassion and integrity, they connect more deeply with themselves often leading to a greater sense of fulfilment. By integrating their heart with mind, individuals can align their actions with their core values, creating a more holistic sense of purpose.

Think of an artist who might achieve great success in their field but might find true fulfilment by using their art to raise awareness about social issues or to connect with others on an emotional level, blending creativity with empathy.

In similar fashion, Education heart often complements educated mind in effective communication, collaboration and relationship building. While intellectual knowledge provides individuals with factual and technical expertise, emotional Intelligence equips them with the ability to understand, manage & leverage emotions - both their own and others. This capability is crucial for navigating social interactions and fostering a positive work environment.

Without educated heart, even the most knowledgeable person may struggle with Miscommunication

Interpersonal conflicts & misunderstandings, which can undermine their ability to collaborate effectively. Mother Teresa epitomizes how educating heart complements educated mind. She founded the "Missionaries of Charity" dedicating her life to serving the poor and most marginalised in society. Her success in mobilizing support & leading a global organization was not just due to her intellectual capabilities but also her profoundly educated heart. Her ability to connect deeply with people from all walks of life, show empathy & communicate with genuine compassion was central to her work. This fostered a sense of trust and commitment among her followers.

Furthermore, while knowledge equips individuals with the tools to understand & analyse information, it does not inherently prepare them to manage stress, cope with failure. It's the educated heart which helps in developing resilience and effective coping strategies.

Thus while educated mind provides the foundation, educated heart builds the resilience & adaptability needed to effectively manage the complexities and pressures of everyday life. This can be exemplified through the life of DR. BR Ambedkar. While he was an eminent scholar, he had faced immense personal and social challenges including discrimination and social ostracism due to his cast. He channelled his experience & struggles into a powerful drive for Social justice and Reform. His ability to navigate interpersonal conflicts, maintain composure under pressure & persevere through setbacks demonstrates how educated heart & resilience can help in dealing with pressures of everyday life.

On top of that, Educating the mind without educating the heart can lead to a society where intellectual achievements are not guided by ethical considerations. knowledge and skills, when unaccompanied by empathy, Compassion & moral values, May be used in ways that are detrimental to individual & society.

This can be manifested in various ways, such as unethical business practices, scientific research without regard to its social impact, or the leadership that neglects the needs and rights of the people.

Many Nazi officials and leaders during the Holocaust were well educated. They included lawyers, doctors & Scientists

who were capable of rational thought and Complex problem solving. Despite this, they participated in or facilitated heinous acts of genocide, signifying that their intellectual education did not encompass moral or ethical principles. Their hearts were not educated to value human life and dignity, resulting in atrocities.

This all signifies why a holistic education that nurtures both the mind and the heart is essential for fostering ethical behavior and creating a more just and compassionate world.

So, the critical question now is what can be done to effectively educate the heart?

To educate heart, firstly, Schools should integrate social-emotional learning programs that teach students to manage emotions, set positive goals, show empathy and maintain positive relationships and make responsible decisions.

Secondly, creating a school culture that values kindness, respect and cooperation is a must. Positive reinforcements for compassionate acts can further encourage children.

Also, engage parents and the broader community to ensure that the values taught in school are reinforced at home and other social settings. Encourage children to participate in community service projects and civic activities to foster a sense of social responsibility. Mindfulness and Reflection practices such as journaling or group discussion about personal values and experiences, can deepen students' understanding of themselves and their impact on others.

To wrap up," "Educating the mind without educating the heart's no education at all" highlights the necessity of holistic education. A well rounded education nurtures both cognitive and emotional capacities, ensuring individuals not only excel academically but also act with integrity and compassion. This fosters responsible decision making, ethical behavior and a deeper understanding of oneself and others, ultimately contributing to a more just and empathetic societies.

THE GREATEST GLORY IN LIVING LIES NOT IN NEVER FALLING, BUT IN RISING EVERY TIME WE FALL.

#PHILOSOPHICAL

SUBMITTED BY: PALAK KHADELWAL

Disclaimer: The viewpoints in the topic are strictly personal of the writer above. The role of Rau's IAS Study Circle is to present the write-up in its original form, hence the study circle neither endorses nor rejects any viewpoint in the submission. The purpose is only to showcase the manner of writing.



Therefore, it is the sole responsibility of the reader to use his/her intellect to check the veracity of viewpoints.

Dr. APJ Abdul Kalam, also known as 'missile man of India' famously underwent a life full of contradictions externally but great hope and real from inside.

Willing to join **Indian Airforce**, Dr. Kalam gave exam for entrance, wherein he failed not once or twice, but big Seven times! These **failure** instead of losing courage, was taken as **learnings**.

Moving ahead, he not only became a Successful **scientists**, but also achieved Meticulous success by being an important part in '**mission smiling Buddha**' for testing **atomic bomb** as well as being the President of India, and this time not only being part of Airforce, but heading all the three wings, i.e., Army, Navy and Airforce.

The dream of Dr. Kalam which he saw breaking away (temporarily) didn't let him stop, but more ahead to achieve what he deserved.

His story depicts how today he is remembered not because he never failed but because he did fail, and had the Courage to rise every time.

Further, this essay would delve upon why falling down is inevitable and important, how greatest glory lies in rising after fall and more.

Firstly, why is it so that falling down is inevitable and necessary in the journey? To answer this, let's consider the lifecycle of a **human being**.

During **childhood**, a person when trying to walk straight on their legs falls multiple times before she/he is able to run a race. Similarly, an adult faces many rejections before they are not able to make their families proud. Also, an **elderly** undergoes many chronic diseases before they realise the importance of healthy lifestyle.

Falling down must not be considered as a shameful act but a precedence to Success. A fall teaches the person about necessity for further improvement. For instance, failures of Indian National movements before 1905 taught Gandhiji that strategizing Satyagraha can only help India.

Similarly, it is worth to be mentioned that mostly **no person** is born perfect with no chances of mistakes in their lifetime. During Medieval Indian History, Mohammad Bin Tughluk who though tried to develop his territory by agricultural advancement, modern fort architecture, its received a setback almost all the times due to inherent mistake in strategizing.

Further, a **journey** is always bigger than the **milestone**, where though milestone is composed of only **success**, but journey encompass both **upward** and **downward** phases. The case in point is **Thomas Edison**. A scientist who invented a light bulb. Before success, he actually failed for 10,000 times, which he called that as 10,000 ways of not lighting the bulb, depicting resilience.

The importance of failure is not only depicted by people, but nature as well. The geological processes consists of **construction** and **destruction**, show how both move **side by side** without emphasis on formations solely.

Moving ahead, it must be considered that Afterall why greatest glory is in rising after falling rather than to never fall.

Winston Churchill once said that 'success is not final failure is not fatal, it is the courage to continue that counts.' These words enhances the significance of courage in rising.

In the ground of competition, a the player always wishes to have a good competitor as there is no happiness in wining without a haunt failure. This makes the success worry to celebrate. Moving back to Ancient History, the life of Shivaji shows his real and vigour in fighting for his territory with powerful enemies. This **success** though **bundled** with **some failures** A fills inner self with **satisfaction**.

Further, when an individual gets up after a setback, it teaches her/him to various ups and downs of life, enhancing the persistence and courage to fight in future for against failure. For instance, **Indo-China war of 1962**, though gave shock along with failure from China, it became a reason to **enhance security** measures in the border area.

When a person stands straight after being pushed up by mistakes, it develops a **true achiever** of **success** and goal. Taking case of India during **1960s**, When it was dependent on America's, **PL-480 scheme** for wheat import. The humiliation from them became a cause for **Green Revolution** in India, providing **self-sufficiency**.

If we were to consider greatest glory in not falling, then it simply implies that a person is devoid of mistakes, i.e., they won't be able to understand the general **point of view** involving failures in life. This tendency will be a seeding ground for over-confidence leading to an inevitable downfall. For instance, Adolf Hitler during Nazi role in Germany took various steps which were not revolted by countries like Britain and France, causing fuel and overconfidence in his mind, leading to **defeat** in **world War II**.

It must also be considered that as per the **mythological texts** and **scriptures**, even gods made mistakes but they even talked got up after falling down Taking care of Ramayana where lord Rama left his wife Sita alone to capture an illusive deer, leading. To kidnap by Ravana.

These stones coupled with **Panchatantra** and **Jataka** tales depicts that glory lies in a person's **ability** to **solve the** crisis after failures rather than wishing or expecting for none.

Further, an as understood that rising up is highly significant, what are the **ways** by which a person can rise after a fall.

It requires a deep **spirit** of sportsmanship to firstly **accept** that she/he has failed during the journey of success.

For instance, when **Lal Bahadur Shashtri** was a Railway minister in Indian Cabinet, he resigned from the post when there was an accident of a train. Though here he was not directly responsible, he accepted the failure of his department.

Moving ahead, valves of persistence, resilience, endurance and not losing the hope must be embedded to decide for future endeavours after a get back.

Taking care of Buddha here, who during his journey of attaining salvation tried multiple paths and failed in all till the last paths and failed in all till the last one, depicting **strong persistence** that he possessed towards **humanity**.

Along with this, & the ability to rise denotes the positive mindset which is necessary in all. During the economic Balance of payment crisis during 1990, the positive and learning mindset Dr. Manmohan Singh helped India witness LPG (liberalisation, Privatisation, Globalisation) Reform.

Together with above components, person must be courageous enough to accept mistakes in front of the policy and commit to not perform them again.

To conclude, almost all the great leaders, scientists, entrepreneurs, politicians, social activists, teachers, administrators, etc. are remembered today because of the great struggle which they faced in their life as setback to more at and achieve great success.

A journey filled with only success does not create worthful feeling, Whereas journey with ups and downs is celebrated widely. As we know that Britain did not faced any struggle within the country, there is no feeling of winning satisfactions as in Indians due to Indian National movement.

Though life seems to be a Jigsaw ride or snake in ladder puzzle, it should always be dealt positively as taken by Dr. Kalam in this motivating and inspiring life journey.

VIOLENCE IS THE LAST REFUGE OF THE INCOMPETENT.

#PHILOSOPHICAL

SUBMITTED BY: SHIVAM YADAV

Disclaimer: The viewpoints in the topic are strictly personal of the writer above. The role of Rau's IAS Study Circle is to present the write-up in its original form, hence the study circle neither endorses nor rejects any viewpoint in the submission. The purpose is only to showcase the manner of writing.

Therefore, it is the sole responsibility of the reader to use his/her intellect to check the veracity of viewpoints.



After returning from the dingy & god forsaken trenches of WW-I. Adolf Hitler found his nation \$33 Billion in debt, disarmed & robbed off its territories. Outraged & humiliated he formed the Nazi Party & rose to highest political office of Chancellor after series of electoral victories. He had all the authority to rebuild the broken nation & start afresh. However consumed by hate & loathe he chose the quite contrary, blaming innocent minorities - Jews, Gypsies etc for Germany's losses & declared war against adversaries & neutral nations alike.

According to reports 6 million Jews died in the holocaust & 55 million total fatalities in WW-II. The by-products of which are visible even today leading to more violence & bloodshed at this very moment in Israel.

Thus Gandhiji stated that violence is a clumsy weapon which creates more problems than it solves.

But who chooses violence as an option? Many call such individuals 'incompetent', this adjective should not be confused with 'fool'. An incompetent individual is often well aware of the problem & its possible solutions. But either overlooks innovative & peaceful solutions or pursues half cooked plans often unwillingly & blaming others for lacunae in own personality. Leading to dead ends & wrongly conceived state of "violence as last option".

Violence itself can be physical, social in form of exclusion & discrimination, economic-as in exploitation, verbal & psychological - torture & Coercion.

In this essay various dimensions of violence & nature of its perpetrators is discussed. At the level of nations, it is often perceived that zero-sum game governs global order. That is, benefit of others is seen as loss of self.

Obviously, this is a very narrow opinion & in stark contrast to idea of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam. Incompetent national leaders often do not even really try to collaborate & cooperate with their counterparts, seeing value in building relations & developing together.

For example - UNFCCC is one such forum where all nations can discuss the global problem of climate change. It requires \$100 billion from side of developed to assist them to adopt green solutions. However, us president Donald Trump withdrew from Paris deal without consideration of lives at stake. According to IPCC, island nation of Kiribati will be the 1st one to be drowned in ocean water for the pollution they haven't even contributed to !

Obviously, this an act of economic violence from side of developed nations against less developed who are actually witnessing human life & infrastructure losses.

This sorry state of affairs is visible within nations as well-developed or not.

Our very own nation is grappling with issues regionalism & communalism. Both results of unfounded fears & wilful ignorance. Regionalism is the state where concerns for ones own ethnic & geographic territory, supersedes the value of nationalism. Surely this a position of 'incompetence' where sons of soil are given priority so called "outsiders".

E.g.- Haryana governments legislation reserving 75% of private jobs for locals, recently struck down high court.

Whereas, communalism - the biggest 'thorn in the foot' of the nation refers to the ideas of incompatibility & intolerance of two communities / religions. This is grossly

false notion for a country like India which has practiced unity in diversity for past 1000s of years from Greek & Persian invasions to peaceful coexistence under Islamic rulers till colonial rule.

However still due to certain wicked of incompetent actors who cannot look past their selfish gains - political or economic, episodes of communal violence have been recurrent - Jabalpur, Godhra, Muzaffarpur etc. Recently it has taken the shape of economic boycotts of One community by majority. Ambedkar called such acts as worst form of violence.

In Indian polity to violence & elections are two phenomena that go hand in hand. Use of Money & Muscle power to win elections has become a largely accepted norms. 40% of sitting MPs have criminal cases against them & 25% accused of serious crimes. In the recently held west Bengal local elections in many blocks competitors didn't even file nomination papers due to intimidation by criminal elements.

Such criminal backgrounded candidates are well aware that they cannot win votes based on their work & personality, thus are basically incompetent to fight fair elections, Therefore adopting unethical measures to guarantee victory.

Let's now dwell into domain of society & family. At the level of society it is often observed that whosoever is different is considered undesirable & thus oppressed.

In the case of Indian society this oppressed section is mainly SC & ST communities. Mostly they are target of violence because of reservation they get which is basically their constitutional right under articles 15 & 16. Incompetent candidates are often oblivious of the fact they are themselves responsible for their dissatisfactory performance/ joblessness. And they often project this incompetence onto SC/ST candidates as reason for their current states.

Cases of suicides by SC students aren't uncommon even in prestigious educational institutes like IIT's where they often face casteist slurs. This is the most pervasive form of verbal & psychological violence that now also visible in

economic dimension. Almost 90% of manual scavengers are SC, while SC farmers are mostly landless-owning just 10% of total agricultural land as for Land & Livestock holding survey of NSO.

In the dimension of family, women and children are at the receiving end of violence, served by the patriarchal setup based on age old & false notion of men as the leader of family.

Incompetent husbands often cannot sit well with the idea of wives earning more than them. And her only job is to serve the aspirations of the family as good wife, mother etc.

Almost 58% women of reproductive age are anaemic in India due to denial of adequate nutrition, as per NFHS 5. While women participation in work force is mere 33% in FYZZ (NSO report). While 30% women continue to suffer from domestic violence.

Ultimately, the least talked about form of violence is violence against self. And it ranges from economic, psychological to physical in form of suicides.

Though it may come as a hard pill to swallow, when people do not meet the desired goals, it develops stress, anxiety & depression. The cause may be internal - lack of adequate skills or feeling of incompetence & person may attempt - illegal and unethical measures.

This committing crimes, getting convicted & ending up behind bars or in worst case taking life of self. According to NCRIS in 2021, 8% of total member of suicides was by students.

From above discussion it is clear that violence is undesirable & mostly unrequired. Mahatma Gandhi said - 'weak can never forgive, forgiveness is the attribute of the Strong'.

However it is also said that 'tolerance becomes a crime when applied the evil'. Many a times even noble & competent individual / group / nation have to adopt violence to put a stop to greater violence.

Epics of Ramayana & Mahabharata both involve wars leading to deaths of many. In both cases noblemen -

ethically & morally sound had to adopt violence & pick up weapons. Chanakya states that in order to avoid war, a state should always be ready for war. As peace is built on strength.

Indian constitution states that life & liberty can be denied in accordance with due process of law (Article 21).

Thus it is not true that only incompetent may seek violence. The true determinant in such case is 'contractarian ethics'. Individual, groups & nations are part of one social, Organisational & legal contracts. If an action/inaction leads to breach of contract violence may be permissible to right the wrongs.

Thus if SC/ST person is harassed, it is a breach of legal contract & legally correct "counter violence" is expected from side of state & it cannot termed as immoral. Similarly

misdeeds like domestic violence, Suicides etc are both breach of social & Legal contracts and in correct.

In order to counter these episodes, capacity building is required at all levels with strong institutional frame works. Eg – Moral education from childhood, skilling & technical education of youth, balanced inclusive development on lines of 17 SDGs at national level for regional & community development stranger multilateral institutions & amendment of UN charter to incorporate voice of global south at international level.

These measures shall ensure attainment of maximum potential of all & moral development. Such that even if tides of trying times rise, individual shall never abandon the boat of virtues & peace.